ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY FORESTERS



. . . there they were, both in the mid[illegible] of the frail and dangerous bridge, glaring at [illegible].

[illegible] 28

FOULSHAM'S BOY AND GIRL FICTION LIBRAR

ROBIN HOOD
AND
HIS MERRY FORESTERS

By

S. C. JOHNSON, M.A.

ILLUSTRATED IN LINE BY
L. THOMAS ATHERLEY
AND WITH FIVE COLOUR PLATES BY
JAS. E. M'CONNELL

LONDON
W. FOULSHAM & CO., LTD.
NEW YORK TORONTO CAPE TOWN SYDNEY

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN
by C. Tinling & Co., Ltd.,
Liverpool, London & Prescot.
Abridged Edition
19E

CONTENTS

LIST OF COLOUR PLATES

LIST OF LINE ILLUSTRATIONS

ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY FORESTERS

CHAPTER I

THE FEAST AT GAMEWELL HALL

ROGER GAMEWELL rose early, for the day had been marked out for great festivities. Though it was barely light, he found that his servants were already busy with the preparations of the feast. Some were trimming an enormous carcass which was to be roasted whole; others were piling up the logs on a fire that was being coaxed into activity; while the remainder were occupied with the laying of a long table that was to accommodate the visitors.

Roger rubbed his hands gleefully. The preparations pleased him. He liked to do things on a lavish scale, and he could see that, by the time his guests arrived, the Hall would present an appearance of which he could be justly proud.

He strolled into the open and breathed deeply of the fresh air. It was autumn-time and a thick bed of golden leaves strewed the path. With boyish delight, he ploughed his feet into the leaves and made them dance into the air, as he trudged quickly along. Soon he reached the far corner of his little piece of land and he looked over the low fence of rough-hewn logs. Here he could get a view of the distant hills and, by noting how the clouds curled round them, he could tell for certain what sort of weather the day would bring forth.

"Yes," he mused to himself. "It will be fine, but there will be a pleasant nip in the air; it will be just right for the guests who will have to come several miles to be present at the feast."

While he was dwelling on these thoughts, a slight crackling in the wood that skirted his land drew his attention. He glanced in the direction of the noise. What was it ? Perhaps, only a wild boar ; maybe it was a dead branch that the wind had severed ; or was it one of the King's men who was spying on his household ?

The King's men, it must be understood, were the natural enemies of Roger. When the Normans had come and conquered England, they made a law which decreed that hunting was forbidden to the Saxons and that the deer roaming the forests were the property of the King. The Saxons objected strongly to this rule and Roger Gamewell was a staunch Saxon.

Not only did Roger object, but he took little or no notice of the rule : in fact, he found a special delight in hunting because he felt that each deer which fell to his arrow was a protest against the King's harsh treatment.

As it happened, the carcass which was being prepared for the feast, at the very moment that Roger heard the crackling sound, was one of the King's deer, and the King's men knew about it.

Roger stood still for a minute and listened intently. All was silent. " Ah ! " thought he to himself, " it cannot be anything," and, with that, he walked back to the house where he gave the final instructions as to how the feast should be served.

In a comparatively short time, the guests began to arrive. The scene at the entrance of the Hall may be imagined. The greetings, the welcomes, the gossipings and all the other clamourings were just like those of a Christmas party to-day. Everybody was talking at once and the merry peals of laughter could be heard far beyond the limits of Roger's estate.

Soon the master's voice rang out. " Now, my friends, take your places at the festive board and let us do justice to the occasion. As you all know, we are here to celebrate the building of my new hall. The old one, which we pulled down, could not withstand the assaults of those greedy Normans : but the Hall in which you now are is as strong as a castle. Let the King's men come, if they dare, and I warrant you, they will have a warm time "

A loud cheer went up from the guests, for all were of Saxon blood and all, in some way or the other, had reason to resent the coming of the Normans.

As was customary in those days, Roger took a seat at the centre of the table. On his right sat his sister, Dame Fitzooth who had brought Robin, her son. Robin and Will Gamewell, his cousin, were close friends, but they had little opportunity of meeting one another and, it is almost unnecessary to say, they chatted very animatedly together, telling each other all that had happened since they last met. There were just on fifty guests in all—fifty people with appetites made keen by the journey through the forest, on a sharp Autumnal morning.

And the repast was sufficient for the appetites. There was the deer, roasted whole, which two men-servers carried round the table to each guest in turn. The latter hacked off their own portion from whatever part they preferred of the beast. Then there were roasted hares, rabbits and birds, all smelling deliciously with the seasoning of herbs. Root vegetables were piled up on dishes and a coarse bread, made of barley, was supplied in plenty. In addition to all this, there was mead, sack, wine and strong ale.

It was a jolly gathering such as the Saxons had rarely experienced since the coming of their Norman conquerors. The platters were piled up with prodigious supplies of food and the wine and ale flowed freely.

The repast over, it was still light and the air having been pleasantly warmed by a clear sun, Roger suggested that all should repair to the lawn, where some sports would be held. Nothing pleased the company more and it took less than five minutes for the merry throng to arrange itself in a circle on the patch of grass, just outside the entrance of the Hall.

Soon there were shouts and clamours as to who should be made the "Queen of the Ceremonies." On this point everybody seemed of one mind. Marian Harper was the favoured lass. She was a charming girl, typically Saxon, with blue eyes, a fresh complexion and light golden tresses.

Robin had often met Marian in the forest. He admired her beauty but, what was more, he liked her charming

ways and manners. To him, she was a model of what a girl should be. Marian, on the other hand, liked Robin for the manly way he spoke and the skill with which he drew a bow.

In less than no time, Marian was thrust into a seat, placed on a table, and in this position she crowned the merry gathering. Roger sat at her feet and prompted her in her actions. She elected to start the proceedings by singing a song. A small harp was handed up to her; she struck a few chords and commenced to sing about the tyrannies to which the Saxons were required to submit. Everybody listened intently to her beautiful voice.

Just as she was beginning the third verse, a piercing whizz tore through the air and an arrow stuck itself firmly in the frame of the harp. Immediately, there was confusion. Most of the crowd rushed wildly to the porchway or entrance of the Hall. Four people, alone, remained in the open. They were Roger Gamewell, his son Will, Robin and Marian.

Marian sat on her high-perched seat; she had slightly paled but, otherwise, looked proud and defiant. The other three rushed to the fence and peered into the forest glade, towards the spot whence the arrow had come.

"So, it is one of you rascals," exclaimed Roger, as a man in a coat of green calmly walked out of the thicket towards the fencing which surrounded the Hall.

"Yes, we are the King's men," retorted the fellow, "and we have come about the deer which you killed a day or two ago, and which belonged to the King."

Roger smiled sarcastically. "We certainly did kill a deer," he replied, "but we do not admit that it belonged to the King. Let me tell you," he added with some heat, "deer are not the only things we kill, when we are driven to it."

"If it's like that," answered the man in green, "we shall proceed to do our duty"; and with that he motioned to one of his fellows who, immediately, whipped an arrow into position on his bow. Just as the fellow was about to send his shaft on its errand of destruction, he uttered a short, piercing cry and fell backwards.

What had happened may be told in a few words. While

the two were arguing, Robin Hood had gone to the gate in the fence and reached the open glade, where he had a clear view of the greencoats. Realizing what the fellow with the bow intended to do, he had forestalled him by shooting first and by shooting remarkably well.

The little group of the King's men lost no time in dashing back into the forest, taking the wounded fellow with them. This gave Roger a chance to consider the position. He called to Robin, and all the company retired within the Hall.

"Be quite certain," said Roger, "they will be back again in a short time with more men and we shall have to exert all our strength to keep them at bay."

Hardly had he finished the words than a thud on the main door told that an arrow had embedded its point in the oak. The women looked frightened the men, worried.

Roger, Robin and Will were all picked marksmen and they quickly took up points of vantage. In a few minutes the arrows were flying in both directions. None took any effect until Robin, becoming restive, suddenly appeared at an open window and shot directly at the leader of the band. His aim was a true one and the man, who had argued with Roger, fell seriously wounded.

The injury of their leader was the signal for the band to scamper off with their wounded officer.

"I think that has finished them," said Will Gamewell, "and they won't be in any hurry to return."

"Where's Marian's father?" someone asked when the excitement had begun to die down. Nobody could answer the question, so a hurried examination of all the exits and entrances was made. Lying full length beside one of the upper windows, in a narrow gallery, was the old man, with an arrow deeply embedded in his side. One glance was sufficient to show that his wound would prove fatal. Gentle hands carried him down to the feast chamber where he told his hearers, in a whisper, that a chance arrow had caught him while he had stood at the open window to gaze upon the opposing force.

"Marian," said the old man, "if Robin Hood . . ." The sentence was not finished. Her father was dead.

Both sides had claimed a victim.

CHAPTER II

ROBIN HOOD'S EARLY LIFE

EVERYONE was sorry for poor Marian, but nobody felt for her as much as did Robin. This was partly because he, himself, had lost his father under tragic circumstances.

Robin's father, Hugh Fitzooth, was the chief forester of certain lands belonging to the King, then Henry the Second, which were situated in Sherwood Forest. On one occasion, Fitzooth had come across the Bishop of Hereford unmercifully beating a small peasant lad for some trifling offence. Fitzooth soundly rebuked the Bishop and told him he was disgracing the Church. Naturally, the Bishop resented the remarks and, later on, when he had had time to think over his conduct, became afraid that Fitzooth might tell the King, in some indirect way, about him.

There was one method open to a man like the Bishop to save his reputation and that was to discredit Fitzooth in the eyes of the King. This he did in a very simple manner. When, next, he had an audience with the King he told the latter that he was very sorry to have to speak of the brutal conduct of Fitzooth, and then he recounted the incident about the boy exactly as it happened, but said that the beating had been done by Fitzooth instead of by himself.

As a result, the King was angry with Robin's father. Properly, he should have sent for him and told him exactly what he had heard and how he considered him wrong. But the King was a busy man and relied on what the Bishop said. Thus, Fitzooth had no opportunity of defending himself.

A little later, another incident of much the same kind happened. The Sheriff of Nottingham was a very powerful man in the neighbourhood who could do almost anything whether it was legal or not. He lived in a castle, surrounded by many acres of land. A poor farmer held a small field

adjoining the Sheriff's land and this the latter coveted. As a result, the Sheriff threw the farmer into prison on some flimsy pretext and took the field for himself.

Now, Fitzooth had received many kindnesses from the poor farmer from time to time, and, when he heard that his friend had been sent to prison without any reason whatsoever, he lost no time in going to the Sheriff and telling him exactly what he thought.

The Sheriff of Nottingham was a proud man and it was very unusual for anyone to speak to him as did Fitzooth. He smarted under the rebuke and inwardly vowed vengeance.

It so happened that the Bishop of Hereford and the Sheriff met soon after the two incidents, which have been described. The Bishop boasted to the other man how he had lied to the King about Robin's father and he laughed at the way the King had believed the story. The Sheriff listened intently, but said nothing about his own particular grudge against Fitzooth. He merely told the Bishop that he hated the insolent fellow and was right glad that he had been blackened in the King's eyes.

As luck would have it, the King was passing through Nottingham a short while after these two had discussed Fitzooth, and the Sheriff made it his business to meet the King.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I am deeply sorry to have to tell you of the conduct of your chief forester, Hugh Fitzooth. Never a day passes but I hear of some deed of brutality done by him. Moreover he kills your deer and allows others to do the same on payment. There is hardly a law that he does not break, nor a crime he does not commit."

The King frowned. "This is not the first time I have heard evil of Fitzooth," he said. "Only a month or more ago, our worthy Hereford had a similar complaint to make about him. He must be taught I will make an example of him."

Very shortly after, the King's men descended upon Hugh Fitzooth and dragged him off to Nottingham prison. The snow was falling fast as they took him there and, being unprepared for the journey, he caught a chill and died

soon after. The poor man was never told the reason for his arrest.

Robin and his mother were turned out of house and home, and from then onwards they knew how hard life can be. Their Saxon friends were as kind to them as the conditions of that time permitted, but no amount of sympathy could compensate for the loss of a husband and father.

It was during these hard times that Robin's mother made for him a suit of clothes with a hood fixed at the back of the neck, so that Robin could pull this over his head in wet or cold weather. Thus it was that Robin came to be called and known as Robin Hood.

Fortunate it was for Robin that he had an uncle Roger, for this worthy Saxon often invited Robin to come and stay at Gamewell Hall, and spend the time with his cousin, Will. Robin and Will were staunch companions: they both loved the life of the forest, and both were excellent marksmen with the bow and arrow.

One day, Roger heard that there was to be a great fête at Nottingham. There were to be competitions of all sorts: but one event, in particular, he thought would interest Robin. There was an event for boys to shoot with bow and arrow. So, he suggested to Robin that he should present himself and see if he could not win the prize, which was a silver arrow in the form of a brooch.

Robin cared little for such things as brooches, but the glory of winning a prize was much to his liking. For days before the appointed fête, Robin and Will could be seen practising in the woods adjoining Gamewell Hall. Robin seldom missed a mark, so unerring an eye did he possess. Will was also a fine shot, but he knew that his cousin was too good a match for him. On that account, he decided that it would be better to help Robin than to compete against him.

Accordingly, Will spent his time in setting up marks for Robin, in retrieving his arrows and in selecting straight and lithe stems for making fresh arrows. So, early on the morning of the great day, two lads, dressed in their best clothes, could be seen trudging along the dusty road to Nottingham.

Robin's best clothes compared unfavourably with those

of some of the other competitors whom he found at Nottingham. Moreover, the dusty journey had not added to his appearance. As a consequence, it was a sorry little figure that stepped up to the mark, when it was Robin's turn to shoot. A roar of laughter greeted him and among those who laughed the loudest were the Sheriff of Nottingham and his bosom friend, the Bishop of Hereford. Robin had a mind to send his arrow straight at the pair, but he pulled himself together and took aim at the target.

As he straightened himself, his lithe form compelled attention. The crowd immediately became hushed: this was clearly no ordinary archer, no matter what his raiment suggested. The arrow sped on its flight and embedded its point dead in the very centre of the target. A cheer went up from the onlookers and even the worthy Bishop gave a feeble clap. The Sheriff looked surprised.

Robin had two more shots to complete his part in the performance and both repeated the work of the first one. There were all three arrows, when he had finished, embedding their points in the exact middle of the tiny ring. It was a marvellous feat of skill and the onlookers cheered him as no other competitor had been cheered.

Needless to say, Robin won the prize, for nobody could beat what were three perfect shots. The Sheriff rose from his seat and called Robin to him. "What's your name?" he enquired.

"Rob of Lockesley," the boy replied.

This conveyed nothing to the haughty man, though, had he thought a moment, he might have guessed his parentage.

"Rob," said the Sheriff coldly, "I have pleasure in presenting to you a silver arrow. Take it and treasure it, and, if you ever want to serve the King, come and see me."

Rob took the brooch gracefully and said that he certainly hoped to see the Sheriff again, but he refrained from saying how and when. Then, he stuffed the arrow into his pocket and was quickly lost in the crowd.

CHAPTER III

THE YOUNG MAN WHOM NOBODY KNEW

After the death of Marian's father, there was some doubt as to what would happen to the girl. Her mother had died several years before and now she was without a home. But, the good Roger Gamewell waived aside all difficulties and invited her to stay in his household, just as though she were his daughter.

Poor Marian was only too eager to accept the invitation and, for many years, she shed happiness in the Gamewell home. One of her greatest delights was when Robin came over to visit his uncle. Then, Will and Robin would go off with her in the woods and the three would amuse themselves by hunting, trapping, shooting, and so on.

Marian served her two boy friends well. For one thing, she excelled in what is now spoken of as " first-aid," and when either of them suffered cuts or other injuries—as they often did—it was always Marian who bandaged their wounds and comforted them.

On one occasion, Robin suffered a nasty gash in the arm while he was dispatching a wild boar. The blood ran profusely and, had it not been for the girl, it is more than possible that Robin would have bled to death. She bandaged the wound so efficiently that, with the aid of Will, it was possible to get Robin home and, there, he was promptly put to bed to rest.

As he lay on his bed of dried bracken that night, Marian crept up to his side, to see if he were comfortable. Robin opened his eyes and gazed on the girl, smilingly.

" Marian," he said, after a moment's hesitation. " I want to give you something."

With that, he fumbled about in the dim light and, then,

produced a brooch. It was the silver arrow that he had won at Nottingham.

Marian took the brooch in both hands and kissed it. She understood what Robin meant: she knew that he prized it highly and, by giving it to her, she recognised that he was asking her to accept a token of his admiration for her.

Living such a healthy outdoor life it was not long before Robin was once more perfectly fit and ready for further exploits. It happened, just about that time, that some games and tournaments were to be held at the town of Mansfield, and Robin suggested to Will that they should both enter for some of the competitions.

Now, the games held at Mansfield had long been considered of a very rough and tumble character, with the result that Marian would have preferred the boys to have stayed away. But she was not the sort of girl to show fear in any form and she contented herself with telling them to be careful.

Off they went and soon reached Mansfield. They found the town thronged with people making merry. All sorts of games were being prepared, but it was the archery competition that attracted Robin and Will most. They both entered their names and then repaired to the spot where the shooting was to be held.

There, a large board was set up with three circles chalked upon it. The chief steward, then, explained that all the entrants should fire one shot apiece and that any whose arrow rested in the outer ring should withdraw from the contest. Thus, the rounds should proceed until only one archer remained, he being the winner of a very fine belt which was offered as a prize.

Soon, the shooting began and, when only five archers remained in the competition, a great noise was heard. The crowd looked around and found that a party of ten green-coated foresters had arrived. These ten men prided themselves on their markmanship and demanded to be allowed to take part in the contest. Naturally, the fellows who had already dropped out during the earlier rounds, and who were still hanging about, objected. It was unfair, they said, and it certainly was. But the

foresters could command force and, had not the steward allowed them to join in, it is probable that they would have prevented the rounds from proceeding.

Thus, when the contest was resumed, there were ten foresters and five others, all competing for the belt.

As luck would have it, nine of the green-coated men acquitted themselves badly and were soon dismissed. The remaining one was a sullen fellow, but he knew how to handle a bow.

Soon a time came when three only were left to take part. One was the sullen fellow, another was Robin and the third, a quiet, shy youth who said little and who seemed anxious to be left to his own devices.

On proceeding, the shy competitor failed to hit the mark and, thus, the battle was left to Robin and the sullen forester. The crowd grew boisterous and it very quickly resolved itself into two camps—those that favoured the Norman rule and those who wanted the Saxon to win. Gibes and epithets were hurled from one side to the other and, when Robin finally scored the winning point, the tumult was indescribable.

With difficulty, Robin worked his way through the noisy crowd and received the coveted belt from the chief steward: but, no sooner had he fixed it round his waist, than the whole body of foresters fell upon him and beat him with staves. Poor Robin had a hard struggle to save himself from death and it is unlikely that he would have escaped alive had it not been for the support given him by Will, who stuck manfully beside him, and the shy youth whom nobody knew anything about.

As it was, Robin lost the belt which was snatched from him while the fray was at its height. Robin was angry: he had always hated the King's men since his father had died and now he hated them still more, if such were possible. He whispered something to Will and the two, not being able to find the shy youth to thank him, slipped away and were soon miles out of Mansfield.

There was very little that Robin ever missed and, though he had missed the belt which he had won by hard work, he had not missed a chance remark that one of the foresters had made. This was to the effect that they would show



' Marian," he cried, rushing to embrace her.

the belt to the Sheriff, when they got back to Nottingham, and tell him how it had been won in fair fight.

Robin had an idea. As they are going to Nottingham, why not intercept them on the loneliest part of the road and retrieve the prize? If they were taken unawares, it would not be a very difficult matter.

Accordingly, Robin and Will hurried along the Nottingham road and lay in ambush at a spot where the trees were thickest. There they lay quite still for a considerable while when, suddenly, they heard men's voices. Robin and Will stealthily picked up their bows, but before they could fire, an arrow whizzed through the air and buried its sharp point into the arm of the first forester who came to view.

As quick as lightning, a second arrow followed the course of the first and implanted itself in the leg of a forester who had rushed up to the help of his wounded comrade. Robin and Will looked at each other in amazement. Who was this who was performing their work and doing it with such unerring skill? The two dashed into the open and glanced down the road. At the same moment, another also stepped out into the road: it was the shy youth whom nobody knew. He was the one who had aimed the arrows so deftly.

There was no time for greetings and congratulations. The three turned on the surprised foresters who, with some difficulty, were trying to carry off their wounded comrades. In order to discourage the pursuit, one of the band snatched the belt from the first man to be wounded and flung it in Robin's direction. "Take it," he growled.

The young man whom nobody knew was the first to reach the belt. He picked it up and walked towards Robin.

"Shall we let them get away?" he asked, "I think they have had enough to learn a good lesson."

Robin thanked him and was about to ask how he came to be on the very spot that was selected for the attack when his eyes opened wide.

"Marian," he cried, rushing up to embrace her, "to think that you are the young man whom nobody knew!"

Yes, it was Marian. As soon as the two set out from home, the girl had had msgivings about their safety. Accordingly, she had hastily borrowed some clothes from the servants at the Hall and followed, as quickly as she could, after them.

CHAPTER IV

ROBIN HOOD IS APPOINTED LEADER OF THE OUTLAWS

THOUGH we all look upon Robin Hood as a hero, it must not be forgotten that, almost as soon as he grew to be a man, he was outlawed by the King, Richard the First, *Coeur de Lion*, upon his accession to the throne. Consequently, his life was always in danger. An outlaw, it may be explained, could be killed at any moment and whoever did the killing would be accounted a loyal subject of His Majesty.

It was largely on this account that Robin had grown to feel that it was unwise for him to continue to live at Gamewell Hall. Anyone might come with a force of men and surprise him; and if they killed him, they would certainly find favour in the Sheriff's eyes. It was not that he feared death, but he felt that it was laying open the other occupants of the Hall to dangers they did not deserve.

Accordingly, Robin decided that it would be best for all concerned if he went off and lived in Sherwood Forest. He could pay frequent visits to the Hall and see Marian and his Uncle, whenever he chose. Fortunately he knew of a small band of men who were already making a home in the forest, and he decided to go and throw in his lot with them. They were all outlaws, as he was, and nothing would please him more than to share their dangers, their goodfellowship and their open-air life.

To all these men, Robin was already a hero, for he had played many tricks on the Sheriff which had pleased them, since they, too, had reasons for disliking this officious man. Thus it was that one evening, when the little band was settling down to the last meal of the day, the outlaws heard a crackling of the branches, close at hand. They looked up,

somewhat startled, and there they saw Robin Hood standing before them.

Their apprehension immediately gave way to pleasure and a cheery welcome was accorded to Robin. But when Robin asked if he could join them and throw in his lot with them, their rejoicings knew no bounds. It was, above all, the thing they wanted, for up till then, they felt that the little band required some form of leadership, which, so far, it did not possess.

That night, the group of outlaws did not retire to rest at the usual hour: but the men sat around the camp fire and talked over their plans for the future. It was the wish of all present that Robin Hood should become their leader, since he could give the best performance of any man with the bow, the sword and the quarterstaff, which were the usual weapons of the period, and, moreover, he was a born leader.

Robin was the only one who demurred. He said that it was hardly right that he should be the head of the band, as he was the last comer. There were other excellent men already in the band, whose claim to leadership was greater than his. However, he was over-ruled and, in the small hours of the morning, just as the rays of light were breaking through the trees, Robin consented to be the captain of the outlaws.

General satisfaction was expressed at this step forward in the history of the band, and every man knelt and swore allegiance to Robin. It was a most impressive sight to see the men taking the oath. They placed one hand on Robin's bow and the other on their heart, while repeating the solemn words.

As soon as this part of the ceremony was completed, Robin made a speech in which he promised to do his utmost for the good of his followers. He said that he would never shrink from succouring a man in distress, however much danger might be entailed, and he expected this to be a rule with everybody.

Moreover, he laid it down as a law of the band that a poor man was never to be robbed, though a rich man might be, if he were haughty and over-bearing. The weak were to be assisted in overcoming their troubles. Women and

children, whether rich or poor, were never to be robbed or endangered in any way: and, whenever it were possible to lighten the burdens of a Saxon, an attempt was to be made to do so. This, in short, was Robin Hood's creed. Though it was hardly a lawful code of behaviour, it was, nevertheless, one which had its good parts, and it certainly led him and his followers into many exciting adventures.

Robin Hood lost no time in making his plans. So far, the band had lived in the open, gaining no more shelter than was afforded by trees and bushes. This was the first thing to remedy. Men went into distant parts of the woods, where they would excite no suspicion; they cut down tree trunks and dragged them to the encampment. They used them for erecting huts which were plastered with mud and leaves to make them cosy and free from draughts. Several of these huts were built within an enclosure which was surrounded by a tangle of thorny bushes. All around the tangle, a shallow moat was dug and, as there was not sufficient water available to keep the moat filled, the surface was artfully bridged over by dead twigs, leafy branches and other vegetation which hid the true nature of the construction. Were any unsuspecting individuals to try to enter the encampment by crossing this moat, they would fall through the light covering and, then, their troubles would begin. Of course, it was necessary to provide safe paths which crossed the moat at certain intervals; but these took a zig-zag form and only Robin's men knew where they were stationed. Thus, the encampment became a secure home for its inhabitants.

It was surprising how comfortable the band made itself in its improved quarters. The thick trees, all around, provided shelter from the winds and there was plenty of space between the huts to permit of fires being lit. Thus, food could be cooked readily and plenty of warmth was always available. As to the food, much of it was supplied by the flesh of wild animals, but there were several clearings in remote parts of the woods where crops were grown.

And so, Robin established quite a colony of his own, gaining many loyal supporters. Amongst them was one, Will Scarlet—so called because of his bright red hair—who

was to prove himself an able lieutenant under Robin's leadership.

When Robin joined the band, it was from twenty to thirty strong. The number, however, grew steadily, for no man was ever refused who gave promise of becoming a loyal follower and who was of Saxon birth.

CHAPTER V

THE TALL THIN MAN

THERE were times when Robin preferred to ramble through the woods by himself. It was on one of these occasions that he had set out alone. It was a brilliant day in summer when everything seemed peaceful.

He had proceeded a good way when he approached a little stream that he had often crossed before. Over the stream was a bridge, but it was hardly a bridge as we know such things to-day. It was no more than a plank of wood stretching from one bank to the other. To cross over needed some care, because there were no upstanding sides, and you could slip off into the water with the utmost ease.

As Robin drew near to this primitive construction, he saw a tall, thin man approaching from the opposite direction. The two glanced at each other and both quickened their steps, the idea being that each desired to cross over first.

From quickened paces, the speed of both men developed into a trot and then a gallop. Almost simultaneously, they both dashed up to the opposite ends of the bridge and, in a couple of paces, there they were, both in the middle of the frail and dangerous bridge, glaring at each other.

"Let me pass," roared Robin, his temper getting the better of him.

"I only go back for better men than myself," replied the tall, thin man, in a manner betraying slight amusement.

"Then, go back," Robin roared even louder than before.

"Only for better men than myself," said the tall man, in a silvery voice.

"Must I show you who is the better man, then ?" came Robin's reply.

"Now, 'pon my faith," said the tall man, "after that remark, I go back for no one."

"Go back," roared Robin.

The tall, thin man held a staff in his hand and, when Robin roared at him for the third time, he just glanced at the staff.

"Oh, I see," said Robin, "it's your stick that makes you bold."

"Not a bit," came the soft reply.

"Wait where you are while I cut one from yon tree like it," said Robin, thunderingly, "and then we shall see all about it."

"Certainly," came the answer.

"On your honour, you won't move?" queried Robin.

"Undoubtedly," replied the tall, thin man.

With that, Robin turned about and ran to the tree to which he had pointed: cut himself a branch equal to that of the stranger and came back. While he had been busily doing all this, the tall, thin man had stood immobile, exactly as he had promised.

Now that each was armed with some sort of weapon, the fray could begin. Robin raised his stick and, almost instantaneously, his adversary did the same. Smack, and both men received the full force of the other's weapon. Smack, smack, smack, and the blows began to rain fast and furiously. For five minutes, perhaps, the ordeal continued and neither was prepared to give way. By this time, both men were hoping that the other would cry a halt, but neither did. Then, the tall, thin man brought down a lucky stroke on Robin's legs, which made him dance. As Robin jerked his legs about in pain, he lost his balance and fell headlong into the stream. Splash went the water and the tall, thin man gave a roar of laughter.

"It's nothing to stand there laughing about," muttered Robin, as he blew the water from his nostrils and picked the water weeds from his hair.

"Come along, come along," said his adversary, coaxingly. "It will cool your temper, if it does nothing else." And, with that, he bent down and dragged his opponent out of the water.

Once on dry land, Robin looked at the man squarely. "You can use a staff manfully," he said.

"And, so can you," replied the good-natured one

"Do you know why you lost ?" he went on to query.

"Perhaps," said Robin.

"Well, don't lose it again. It wasn't that you lacked any skill. By Jove, I wouldn't go through that little business again for a great deal."

"To tell the truth," said Robin guiltily, "I am very worried."

"Then, why didn't you say so, right at the start ?"

"Does a man admit that he is worried and bad tempered ?" queried Robin.

"Of course he does, if he is a man," replied the tall, thin fellow, "but he must be a man."

With that, the two prepared to go their ways, but before parting, the tall one begged a favour. "Tell me, if you can, where I can find a man named Robin Hood ?"

Robin smiled. "Ten minutes or more ago, he was standing on that very bridge," he said.

The stranger looked puzzled. "On that bridge ?" he queried, pointing to it.

"Yes," said Robin, nodding his head.

"Goodness me. Do you mean to tell me that you are the very man I am seeking ?"

"Apparently," replied Robin, with a smile.

"Then, sir, I am pleased we have met, for I have not only found you; but I have also discovered, in a very forcible manner, that you are just the type of man my friends tell me you are."

"And, your name ?" queried Robin.

"Men call me Little John."

Linked arm in arm, Robin and Little John left the scene of their troubles and thus began, in this curious and unusual manner, a firm friendship, which only death terminated.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRICE ON ROBIN'S HEAD

It may be wondered why Little John was so eager to meet Robin Hood. The story is an interesting one which can only be explained by telling something of the life of Little John.

He was a Saxon who looked upon the Normans in much the same way as Robin did. As far as the King's foresters were concerned, he heartily disliked them, and the Sheriff of Nottingham was a man for whom he had a supreme hatred.

Little John was a lover of the open-air, much as Robin was. He roamed the woods and found consolation in their beauty and their solitude. Occasionally, he killed one of the King's deer for his food and, thus, he had become a suspect among the men who wore the uniform of the Sheriff. There was little that could definitely be said against him, but there is no doubt that the armed men of Nottingham were not altogether satisfied with his conduct. In short, they were only waiting to be able to tax him with something that would bring him to book, once and for all.

Little John knew exactly what was thought of him and often laughed heartily over the way he had been fortunate enough to throw dust in their eyes.

We now come to the most interesting part of the story. It so happened that Little John had gone into Nottingham on the very day that Robin, Will and Marian went to Mansfield to compete for the belt that the foresters stole.

Thus it was that when the infuriated men, with their wounded comrades, eventually arrived in the town of Nottingham, Little John was there, and saw them. And, of course, he heard all the commotion that their story caused.

The account which the men gave to the Sheriff ran something like this: First, they won the precious belt in fair competition; then, when they set off for Nottingham, they were confronted by a numerous gang of forest thieves—naturally, they could hardly admit that their aggressors consisted only of a party of three—that Robin Hood was the leader of the gang and that, in their opinion, he intended to lead his men on to attack the town of Nottingham itself. They had come to the conclusion that Robin was one of the trio because the onslaught had been made so efficiently, and they felt that nobody else was sufficiently capable of doing it.

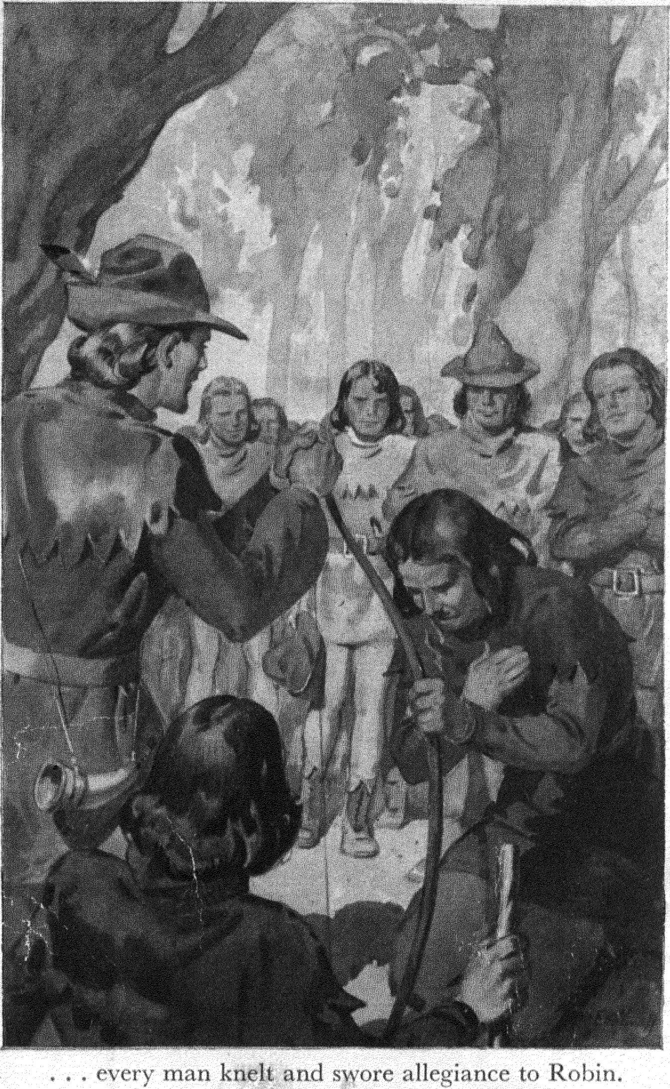
The thought of a massed attack on Nottingham made the Sheriff quake. He hurriedly gave orders that the gates were to be closed; that all the guards were to be called out and posted at points of vantage. As a result, alarm spread through the whole of the town and the people awaited the supposed onslaught with dread. That night, the Sheriff did not retire to bed. He paced the Castle in a dejected and anxious manner.

When day broke and nothing had happened, the people began to criticise the Sheriff and accuse him of frightening them unnecessarily. The facts got to his ears, he grew angry and, being a weak man, really, he had to blame somebody.

Then, for the first time, it dawned on him that the foresters' story may have been exaggerated. Accordingly, he sent some soldiers to the exact spot where the assault happened, to see if the earth and the bushes really looked as though a large body of men had fought desperately there.

Of course, they found little or nothing to suggest any fighting: there were not even a dozen arrows lying within sight and, as for the bushes and undergrowth, they were not disarranged at all. In this way, it became evident that the story told by the foresters was untrue.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Sheriff made the foresters pay dearly for their deception; but that was not all. He vented his anger on Robin Hood because, as he said, Robin had attacked his men without any proper reason. What he did was a common action in those



. . . every man knelt and swore allegiance to Robin.

[*see page 25*

days. He put a price on Robin's head. And, it was just this that Little John wanted to tell Robin.

As we have already related, Robin and Little John strolled away from the narrow bridge, arm in arm. The latter quickly told his story and warned Robin to be on his guard. Robin smiled. " The man who secures the price put on my head," he said, " will have to earn every penny of it."

Soon the two entered the gate of Gamewell Hall and Robin introduced his new friend to his uncle Roger.

Roger welcomed him affably, but appeared worried.

" My boys," he said, " do you know we are surrounded ?"

" Surrounded ? " queried Robin in astonishment.

" Yes," replied his uncle. " The Sheriff's men are hiding all around the Hall and they have allowed you to walk into the trap, as they think."

Just as he said the words, there was a shout and one of the servants came running into the room. " Master, master," he gasped, " there are dozens of armed men all round the place."

Roger and all the little band of talkers rushed to the windows and looked out on the green belt of sward that ran beside the moat. There, sure enough, were the King's men encircling the Hall, each a few yards apart. They were certainly in earnest and intended, this time, to make sure of their quarry. Every one was well-armed, either with bows or quarter-staves. Robin recognised a man who appeared to be the leader of the band. He was the one who flung the belt at him on the Nottingham road some time before.

" This is going to be a tough fight," said Roger Gamewell, but Robin and Little John only laughed.

Little John rubbed his hands with glee. " It's just the kind of excitement that makes life worth living," he said.

" Look at that giant over there," exclaimed Robin, pointing to a broad-shouldered fellow who stood well over six feet high. " See, he is bending his bow . . . Ah! now he shoots . . . the battle's begun."

What happened after that need not be recounted in detail. Both sides drew their bows now and then, but the

light was rapidly failing. It was very evident that little of any importance could be done that day and it was on the morrow that the attacking party was clearly pinning its faith.

The night came—a night black as ink.

"It is now that we can show our friends across the moat what is what," said Robin. "Who will swim the moat with me and surprise these dogs?" he asked.

Will Gamewell, Little John and two servants immediately volunteered. The attackers had drawn themselves into a group as soon as darkness arrived, and had promptly gone to sleep in order to be fresh and fit for the next day's battle. Consequently, there were no guards posted around the Hall. Thus, it was an easy matter for the five men to creep through a cavity in the fencework, to slip noiselessly into the moat, to swim across the water and to gain the far side without causing any stir.

Once across the moat they crept stealthily along the sward until the encampment was reached. It needed stout hearts to carry the dangerous performance through. "One, two, three," whispered Robin, and the five men rushed into the group of forty or fifty and belaboured their enemy with swords and quarter-staves.

There never was such a scene of confusion, and, when it was at its height, the five gallant men dropped silently into the water of the moat, swam to the other side, and were hauled up to safety by those who were watching at the Hall.

No—five did not come back: only four. The fifth had stumbled in the darkness and had been caught by the soldiers. As soon as this fact became known, Robin, Will and Little John suggested returning in order to release the missing servant. But though their hearts were still strong, their bodies were nearly spent with the exertion, and Roger Gamewell would not hear of it. "'Twould be folly to return now," he said, "and you might all perish."

So, the only thing was to be patient until the morning and, then, to act in whatever way was best.

Marian was up as soon as day broke.

"Come quickly," she cried before the others were really

awake. They rushed to the window where she stood. There, sure enough, was the servant.

" What are they doing ? " she queried and, then, she herself, gave the answer, " Why, they are going to hang him."

There was not a minute to be lost. A soldier had already clambered into a tree: he had a rope in his hands and was tying one end to a thick branch. Below him were two more soldiers waiting to bind up the dejected servant.

Robin whispered to Will, " You take the rascal up in the branches. I will see to the fellows below."

The two men took steady aim, two arrows whizzed through the air, helter-skelter came the rascal tumbling out of the tree and both the fellows below took to their heels, one having an arrow sticking in the fleshy part of his arm.

The servant, now unguarded, glanced hastily around him and dashed off like a colt towards the moat. In a second, he was in the water, swimming lustily towards safety. Yes, he was grabbed by his friends and drawn up into the grounds of the Hall.

As the water streamed out of his clothes, he said " Where's my breakfast ? "

CHAPTER VII

ROBIN HOOD INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO THE SHERIFF

It did not take long for the soldiers to make up their minds to return to Nottingham. "It is all very well," they agreed, "to put a price on Robin Hood's head; but even a head can be bought too dearly." So they determined to leave the prize to more venturesome spirits or, perhaps, for some other time.

At any rate, they packed their belongings and walked back to Nottingham. The Sheriff confronted them as soon as they arrived.

"You cowards," he shouted, "I have a mind to hang the lot of you for disobeying my orders. Personally, I would glory in meeting this reprobate, Robin Hood. If I could only come face to face with him, I would show him something and I would shame the lot of you."

The men hung their heads, but said never a word.

Now gossip has a curious way of travelling and it was not long before the boastful words of the Sheriff came to Robin's ears. One carter told another; the other told a woodman and the woodman told Robin. So the tale travelled several miles in a day or two.

Robin smiled. "The Sheriff wants to see me, does he! Well, he shall see me and he shall see me within a week."

Marian looked at him enquiringly.

"You are not planning to do anything rash or silly, are you?" she asked.

"Oh, no, no, no," replied Robin merrily. "But such a distinguished invitation requires attention and I must not neglect it."

Accordingly, a few days later, Robin set out from home and was soon toiling along the dusty road to Nottingham. He had not the slightest notion of how he was going to face the Sheriff, but he had sufficient confidence in his

own powers to know that something would be sure to turn up to help him.

Something did turn up. A bedraggled butcher came along the highway in a cart which seemed as though it might fall to pieces at any moment. The wheels creaked, the pony panted and the driver was half asleep.

Robin stepped out into the road and addressed the driver. " Whither art thou going, friend ? "

The butcher looked frightened and said that he was making for Nottingham to sell his meat. He had heard of Robin and guessed that he was being stopped by none other than this notorious person.

" Don't take my horse and my goods," he pleaded to Robin. " I'm a poor man who can ill afford to lose even a single penny. If you rob me of my stock of flesh, my wife and children must surely starve."

Robin laughed heartily. " Look here, my man: probably you have heard tales about me: but nobody can truthfully say that I have ever robbed a poor person. I have no objection to killing an occasional deer that is supposed to belong to the King, nor to depriving the worthy Sheriff of some of his ill-gotten wealth: but a poor man—No."

The butcher seemed reassured.

" Well, good luck to you, Robin," he said, " and let me depart for I have a hard day's work before me. It is market-day in Nottingham and, if I can sell all this meat, it will mean many blessings for my wife and children."

An idea flashed through Robin's mind. " My fine fellow, I have thought of an excellent plan. I will buy your meat, if you will sell me your horse and cart as well."

The butcher could hardly believe his ears. " What say ye, master ? " he queried.

Robin repeated the offer, adding that, if he were prepared to change clothes with him, he could have all the contents of the bag of money he was holding.

The butcher glanced at the size ot the bag: he felt its weight: it must be a goodly sum, he thought. Could Robin be really serious ?

By this time Robin was already undoing his tunic and,

in less than a few moments, the dazed and surprised butcher had changed clothes with Robin and had in his hand the weighty bag of money.

"Adieu, comrade," cried Robin, as he climbed into the seat of the cart, "and be careful you don't meet any of the King's men or they may take you for me."

The butcher stood in the road and watched Robin proceed in the direction of Nottingham. He was like a man in a dream: he had made a fortune.

In time, Robin reached the town of Nottingham: he entered through the narrow gateway and proceeded to the part set aside for the meat market. There he found a dozen other butchers, all shouting and trying to sell their supplies. Robin knew very little about the price at which to sell his meat, or how to cut up the joints. This put him in a quandary, but he very soon sliced the dead beasts into pieces and offered them for sale at ridiculous prices. This gained him both friends and enemies. Friends because people could buy from him so cheaply: enemies because he spoiled the trade of the other sellers.

Thus, a commotion arose between the butchers who were trying to stop him selling and the people who wanted to buy from him. Amidst the cries, on the one hand, of "turn him out" and, on the other, of "leave him alone," there came the voice of authority. The Sheriff happened to be passing, and he demanded to know what all the noise was about.

Several people offered, all at the same time, to explain the fuss, and when the Sheriff had gained an idea of the facts, he addressed himself to Robin Hood. "Who are you?" he asked.

Now Robin was an excellent actor and he immediately became a simpleton who knew little of the ways of the world. "I am a farmer, sir," he replied, in an awkward fashion. "My lands are a dozen miles from here, over beyond Lockesley; but they are poor lands and my beasts do not thrive. So, I am selling them to gain a little profit."

"Profit," grunted the Sheriff, thinking of the small charges he had been making for the meat. "How many head of beasts have you left?" he enquired.

"Quite three score, master," said Robin in a meek way.

The Sheriff's eyes sparkled. Here was an opportunity, he thought, of making some gain for himself.

"I will buy them from you," he said.

"Oh! thank you kindly, Master Sheriff," stammered Robin. "That will be good."

There were too many people at hand who might hear about the deal, if it were concluded there and then, so the cunning Sheriff arranged that Robin should come up to the Castle and sup with him that night, where the transaction could be arranged quietly.

Robin arrived at the appointed hour and a right good meal was set before him. The Sheriff was most affable and did his best to ply Robin with wine: but Robin pretended to be very quickly affected and the Sheriff thought it unnecessary to waste good liquor on him any further. Then came the bargaining and Robin very readily agreed to an absurdly low price for his animals. The Sheriff chuckled with glee and arranged that the two should start off early next morning to count the herd.

Soon after the sun rose above the horizon, on the morrow, the Sheriff on horseback set out with the simple butcher, in his cart, in the direction of Lockesley. It was not much use trying to talk with such an uncouth fellow, thought the Sheriff, and very little conversation passed between the two.

However, when Lockesley was not very far ahead, the butcher-fellow began to mention Robin Hood. Here Robin did this, and there Robin did that, he said, pointing out different positions on the landscape. The Sheriff was not a man of outstanding bravery and the mention of Robin made him nervous.

"I have heard of this lawless yokel," said the Sheriff, "and my greatest pleasure would be to run across him. He certainly knows what is good for him, for he keeps well out of my way." To all of which, the butcher in the cart merely replied "Yes."

A little later on, the two men came upon a herd—not of cattle, but of deer. "There," said the butcher, "that's the herd about which I told you."

The Sheriff, at first, thought the fellow was mad: but

he soon concluded otherwise. All sorts of notions ran through his brain. "I don't understand," he exclaimed.

"Let me explain," said Robin, in his most charming manner. "The fact is that you are now about to experience *your greatest pleasure. You are dying to meet Robin Hood. He is at your service, sir," and, with that, Robin doffed his cap and bowed low.*

The Sheriff looked perplexed and was almost overcome. "I don't understand," he faltered, and then, pulling himself together, he pretended to laugh. "Oh, I see," he said, "you have laid a trap for me. Well, I am delighted to meet you Bold Robin Hood." Then, thinking that flattery would give him his only chance of escape, he went on, "You are a fine fellow and I have often heard that you never wrong a soul, if you can help it. Of course, now that you have had your little joke you will let me go home unmolested."

"Nay, nay," replied Robin, in the politest of ways. "For my part, I am downright hungry and you must be the same. It would be unmannerly to let you go off without satisfying your appetite, especially as food and succour are so near at hand."

The Sheriff turned pale. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Just this," said Robin. "I have many friends in these parts and if I cannot get some of them to help me to repay your hospitality of last night, I should feel thoroughly ashamed."

"But I would prefer to turn back this very minute," retorted the Sheriff.

"And I could not think of it. In fact, I should never forgive myself," was Robin's reply. With that he blew his horn, and in the twinkling of an eye, four men appeared from the depths of the forest.

"Blindfold this gentleman," he commanded, "and conduct us to the encampment."

The men bowed and, though the Sheriff seemed prepared to resist, he allowed a bandage to be placed over his eyes and the escort led the way to the camp in the wood.

Arrived there, the bandage was removed and the Sheriff glanced sharply around him He looked surprised, but

so did the dozen men who were working around the camp fire. His dress, at once, proclaimed him as the Sheriff.

"My friends," said Robin Hood, "let me introduce you, one and all, to our guest, His Lordship the Sheriff of Nottingham."

The men were bewildered and for a moment they wondered what scheme Robin had on foot now.

"You see," Robin continued, "the Sheriff has publicly proclaimed many times that he would be pleased to meet me face to face. Now he is having his wish fulfilled. Moreover, last night he set an excellent meal before me. It is my desire that you return the compliment and provide him with the best fare you have."

There were cries of assent and, in a short while, a meal fit for a king was spread on the green sward. The delicious smell of roast venison would make any mouth water: but when breakfast was early and noon had long since passed, it is more than likely that the aroma would be particularly welcome. So it was with the Sheriff: he felt ravenous and he ate heartily, and for the time, he overlooked the fact that venison was deer, and deer the property of the King.

When the Sheriff had consumed his ample portion of the meat, Robin turned to him in a manner that pretended to be serious.

"Of course, Sheriff, if you will promise to say not a word to the King about the venison we have eaten, we, on our part, will make a similar promise not to tell of what you have eaten."

With difficulty, the Sheriff suppressed a scowl and feebly smiled instead.

The meal over, the lordly guest made sign to depart. It was evident that he was anxious to get away.

"If you must go," said Robin, "it will be my pleasure to accompany you part of the way home. First, however, we have a little business transaction to complete. We fixed a price, last night, for the heads of beasts."

"Of cattle," interrupted the Sheriff.

"Oh, no," replied Robin. "If you recall my words, you will remember that 'cattle' were never mentioned at all. I simply said 'beasts' and those beasts you saw

just before dinner are the remains of a herd of deer that belonged to my great-grandfather. They are yours at the price agreed last night. The money is in that bag strapped to your belt and I am sorry to say that you do not leave this spot until you have fulfilled your word. The money will be faithfully applied to relieving the wants of the poor and needy who live in these parts."

Robin spoke firmly and the Sheriff felt that there was only one way out and that was to hand over the money. This he did reluctantly. Then his eyes were bandaged and an escort led him a part of the way back to Nottingham.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIAR TUCK JOINS THE OUTLAWS

For two weeks, nothing had happened and, as it was necessary to keep the band of outlaws perfectly fit and in training, Robin called his men together. It was a glorious morning: the sun shone brilliantly and the birds were in full song.

"Now, my men," quoth the bold Robin, "there is a new suit of Lincoln green for the one who is most skilful with his bow, this morning. A stick shall be planted in the earth, yonder, and a small cake shall be stuck on its topmost point. Every one of you shall take turns to fire at it from here, and the best shot shall be adjudged the winner."

The men looked at the distance, which was equal to about fifty yards, and thought of the small size of the cake.

"Master, it will be a tough nut to crack," said Will Scarlet, "but it will give us something worth doing."

So said, the preparations were made and the contest began. Each man took steady aim and every shot was a neat display of what can be done with an arrow. It is not proposed to describe every man's aim, but merely to tell of the winner. Little John was the lucky competitor, for he was able to send the cake flying into the air. Loud cheers greeted his success, and many a slap on the back was he called upon to endure.

"Splendid," cried Robin, "a new suit of Lincoln green was never better earned. You are the finest shot in all the land, if you can repeat the performance."

Little John motioned to a man to set another cake on the stick, and when it was ready, he took good aim. The

cake twirled round and leapt into the air. Little John bowed to his master.

"Beautiful," said Robin, "I've never seen a bowman to equal you."

"Well, if you want to see a better man with the bow," replied Little John, "I know where there is one. I once had a dozen shots against him and he beat me eleven times out of the twelve."

Robin opened his eyes, enquiringly. "What's his name and where does he live?" he asked.

"His name is Friar Tuck and he lives at an abbey close to the Studley brook," replied Little John.

"Then, if he is as good as you say," answered Robin, "I will neither eat nor drink until I have met this Friar Tuck."

Robin was a man who meant what he said and, without more ado, he sauntered off to his tent. He slipped on a vest of chain mail, which his green coat covered; then, buckling on a sword and slinging a bow over his shoulder, he announced that he was setting off immediately in search of this remarkable man who could beat Little John with bow and arrow.

As we have said, it was a lovely hot day and the walk through the woods and fields was particularly pleasant. When Robin had gone many miles, he reached the Studley brook and, being somewhat tired, he sat by the water's edge to rest awhile. The brook was edged on both banks by willows which dipped their hanging boughs into the water. Thus, Robin could sit with his feet almost dangling in the stream without being seen.

Presently, he heard voices—the voices of two men, who were obviously quarrelling. One maintained that the stream was no good for pike fishing, and the other contended with equal force that there was no stream for miles around to touch it.

"Yes, it was excellent for pike"

"No, it was no good at all."

"It was possible to get an excellent breakfast in less than no time."

"A man would starve, if he had to depend on the pike in this stream." And so on.

Robin disliked the conversation, for had he not vowed that he would neither eat nor drink until his mission had been fulfilled ? And was not this a discussion about food ? By this time he was beginning to feel remarkably empty and here were two men reminding him of his condition by talking of breakfasts and pike. His mouth watered at the thought of a nice, tasty dish of grilled fish and it made him annoyed. He listened to the argument more intently than ever, thinking in some mysterious way that, by hearing of this delicious fish, he might appease his appetite.

He listened and he was suddenly struck by the fact that the two voices were exactly alike. Were these men twins, or what ? The voices of no two ordinary men could surely be so similar. Robin was now thoroughly intrigued.

Suddenly, a man appeared among the willows on the opposite bank. He was a friar—very fat and round, with a bald, shiny head and just a little fringe of brown hair encircling the bald part. Though he was by no means handsome, his countenance radiated happiness and there was a twinkling of mirth in his eyes.

" I tell you," quoth the friar to himself, " that there are not enough pike in the stream for one Friday's meal." Then, he immediately contradicted his words by exclaiming, " Then, you tell me where I may find a stream that is better stocked."

The solution of the two arguers with one voice was now apparent. The friar was engaged in a heated argument with himself !

Robin kept quite still where he was hidden. He wondered what sort of a man was before him. The friar walked to the water's edge, and placed a sword upon the grass and, then, proceeded to fit up a rod and line. Soon the coloured float was bobbing about in the water and the holy man began to hum. It was time for Robin to introduce himself.

" Good afternoon, sir," he called.

The friar did not start at the sudden intrusion. He just looked across the stream and returned the greeting.

" May I ask the name of this stream ? " enquired Robin.

"You may," retorted the holy man.

"Well, what is it?" asked Robin.

"It is the Studley brook," came the answer and, with that, the friar gazed at the float as though angling were the only source of interest in the world.

"Then, if it is the Studley brook," said Robin, "I must cross it."

"Then, cross it," replied the friar, as though he were not in the least concerned.

"But, how?" exclaimed Robin peevishly.

"The same way as I should cross it or anyone else would cross it," said the friar, hardly taking his eyes off the float.

Something then happened that made the holy man look up suddenly. Robin had covered him with his bow.

"Sir," he said, in a tone of command, "You come and carry me across, or else——"

Before he had finished the sentence, the friar interrupted.

"If you want me to carry you across, why didn't you say so before?" he asked. With that, he leisurely put down the rod, slipped into the water and waded across, to where Robin stood. Without climbing up the bank, he turned round and said, "Get on my back, and when you want a man to help you, don't point your arrows at him."

Robin clambered on to the fellow's back and felt remarkably pleased that he would not have to get wet.

"Hold tight," exclaimed the friar and then proceeded to flounder across the brook.

It was not easy to wade, knee deep, through the water, but the friar managed it successfully and deposited his burden safely on the opposite bank. He, then, climbed up on to dry land and shook himself, as a dog does when he has retrieved his master's stick.

The friar was a knowing fellow and, while he was going through the antics of a wet dog, he suddenly grabbed his sword, which was on the grass and, then, stood squarely—if so round a body can be square—in front of Robin.

"It's my turn," he said. "I want to get over the stream. Now, you carry me."

With that, he held his sword at 'the ready,' and Robin, who was at too close quarters to use a bow, was utterly at his mercy.

"But," ejaculated Robin. Before he had time to say any more the friar interrupted.

"It is no question of buts. Surely you are man enough to ask no favours which you would not confer yourself."

Robin bowed. "Very well," he said as pleasantly as he could, under the circumstances. "That's fair enough."

In less than a moment, Robin slid into the water and, with the dripping-wet friar on his back, started to carry the weighty burden from shore to shore. The chuckles of the holy man added to Robin's discomforts; but he stuck to his task manfully and the friar was given a safe passage across the stream.

As soon as the friar reached dry land, he burst into fits of laughter, slapping his sides with glee, for he enjoyed immensely the joke he had played on Robin. But his face straightened and the laughs died away when Robin drew himself up to his full height and, in a threatening manner, said, "Once more, my holy friar, you are going to carry me across this stream or I throw you in, neck and crop."

The friar was inclined to argue the point.

"Is there not a proverb," queried Robin, "that admonishes us to carry each other's burdens and another which tells us to keep on doing good?"

The friar shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if you look at it like that," he said, "I will do my best. Get on my back and let this be the last of these futile crossings."

Robin jumped on the broad shoulders of the holy man, as a small boy clambers on to his father when about to enjoy a pick-a-back, and the return journey was immediately begun.

Mid-stream was reached when the friar, quite involuntarily, put his foot on a stone that tilted under his weight. It caused him to sprawl forward, and the sudden jolt made Robin lose his grip. The rest can be imagined. Robin fell backwards into the water and, for one small second, disappeared entirely from sight.

The friar plodded on, as though nothing had happened

and climbed up the bank. Here he turned and saw Robin standing up, wiping the water and the weeds from his face.

"What did you do that for?" Robin thundered. "You did it purposely, and my word, you shall pay dearly for it."

"It was a complete accident," retorted the friar, mildly, "and I should have been sorry had you kept your temper. But, as you want to be rude, be rude and do your worst."

Robin scrambled out of the water and rushed at the friar. There was no room for bows and arrows and no time for swords: it was fists. Though the friar was hampered by weight, he could give back as well as he received, and the blows rained fast and furious.

For five whole minutes, the friar and Robin beat each other like two champions in the ring. And then sense prevailed. Robin pulled himself up and folded his arms to show that he was ready to call a halt to this silly business. The friar did likewise.

"You know how to give a good account of yourself," said Robin.

"And you are no duffer with your fists," replied the friar.

"Isn't it a pity," continued Robin, "that we two who value the same arts should be at loggerheads? A man of your stamp is very much after my own heart."

"And, as for me," replied the friar, "I try to be at peace with all men, if they will let me. But, you wanted to fight and so I had to fight. Now let us be friends and shake hands."

Robin gripped the friar's outstretched hand and shook it. Then, with a little smile of pride, he said, "Now, you just see what might have happened if I had liked to do my worst," and with that, he blew three loud blasts on his horn and waited. Very soon, men in Lincoln green came running up from various directions.

"There," said Robin, waving his arm in the form of a semi-circle, "this is my bodyguard. How would you have liked to have faced the whole lot?"

The friar did not seem to be as impressed as Robin had expected he would be.



"Hold tight," exclaimed the friar and then proceeded to flounder across the brook.

[*see page 46*



He had trained one of his dogs to stand still, with a stone poised on its head, while he shot the stone away.

D

"Just a minute," said the holy friar, and he then put two fingers in his mouth and blew a shrill whistle, in the manner of street urchins. Immediately, a pack of dogs—*there seemed to be hundreds—came romping up, wagging their tails. The friar bowed politely and a little triumphantly to Robin.* "Let me introduce my dogs," he said.

It was a curious spectacle. Robin was facing the friar: some two dozen men in green were looking anxiously to learn what was happening, and a swarm of dogs was barking, enough as to say "What do you want, master?"

Then, Little John, who had come to a halt on the far side of the stream, recognised the friar.

"Halloo, Friar Tuck," he called, "what is happening?"

At these words, Robin gave a start. "Are you Friar Tuck?" he asked.

"That is my name," responded Tuck.

"Then why in the name of everything that is good did you not say so, before I bruised my knuckles on you?" queried Robin. "You are the very man who has brought me into these parts, for I want to meet you," he continued.

"You *have* met me," replied the friar, with a laugh, "so now you ought to be satisfied."

Robin shrugged his shoulders. "What I want to see," he said, "is your manner of using the bow. They tell me you are one of the best shots in the land."

Friar Tuck looked modestly. "I don't know about that," he said, "I can draw a pretty fine line, but as to being one of the best at the game, that's quite another matter."

Friar Tuck had now had time to look carefully at his adversary of a few minutes ago—the man who had suddenly become a friend. "I imagine," he said at length, "that you are Robin Hood, the outlaw."

"I am," replied Robin, not knowing quite how to take the remark.

"A pity," said Tuck.

"What's a pity?" queried Robin.

"A pity that you are not a man who respects the law," answered the friar.

Robin blushed. "Let me tell you," said he uneasily,

"that there is good work which can be done even by outlaws and I pride myself that my band of outlaws does far more good than it does evil. What we take from the rich, we give to the poor. The law, itself, will do that in years to come. So we are only lawless because we are a century in front of the times."

"Hum," grunted the friar, "that's not quite the way the Sheriff of Nottingham explains your doings."

"Enough of this moralizing," said Robin. "May I call my men over to see a display of your archery?"

"If I can amuse you, I should only be too pleased," replied the friar, "but come to that, would it not be an act of grace if we two went across the stream to them? It would be a case of two half-dry men getting wet, instead of dozens who are quite dry?"

"Holy sir," said Robin, "you are an obliging fellow, when in the mood. Yes, we will cross the stream, but I make it a condition that I may have the privilege of carrying you over."

The friar agreed, but shaking his finger at Robin in fun, he said, "No accidents, mind!"

In a few minutes, the two had crossed and, having borrowed a bow and some arrows from one of the men in green, Friar Tuck proceeded to perform some marvellous shots. With the tip of an arrow he could smash a bird's egg when thrown into the air, even though he was nearly a hundred yards away, and he had trained one of his dogs to stand still, with a stone poised on its head, while he shot the stone away, much as William Tell is reputed to have dealt with an apple.

"By Jove," said Robin, "you are showing us some wonderful things. We should like you to join our company. Why not come and be one of us?"

Friar Tuck sighed. "The life would suit me admirably," he said, "for the open-air is always calling me: but my mission on earth is clearly planned for me."

Robin looked confused. Then, in earnest, he said, "Friar Tuck, we have need of you; your manner of handling a bow would be of the utmost service; but there is even more that you could do for us—we need you spiritually. Come and be our chaplain; a band, such as

ours, tends to become rough and uncouth, and you could do much to make us mend our ways."

For several moments, Friar Tuck fidgeted with the tassel on his waist-band. He was thinking. "Very good," he said at last, "if I can really be of use to you."

There was a rousing cheer from the men, and from that moment Friar Tuck was one of Robin Hood's band.

CHAPTER IX

ALAN-A-DALE'S WEDDING

HUNTING was not the only pursuit indulged in by Robin Hood and those merry men whom he had, by now, gathered about him. As the following story will show, he was ever ready to help the weak or those of his countrymen who could not help themselves.

It was towards the close of a summer's evening that Robin and Marian were taking a stroll through the woods. By chance, they followed a narrow path leading to a little pool, and there they espied a man lying full length upon the grass. On their approach, he quickly jumped up as though startled. He faced them squarely and demanded to know what they wanted.

"Nay," said Robin, "it is not what we want but whether you want anything. We wondered if you were ill and needed any help."

"No, I am not ill," replied the stranger, "but help, yes; I do want help, if you can give it me."

Robin and Marian both replied that they were ready to give him all the assistance that lay within their power. The man was tall, young and good looking. At his feet was a harp which seemed to suggest that he was one of the strolling minstrels of which there were several going about the country in those days.

"My story is one of love," said the man rather shyly. "For many months I have wooed a very beautiful maiden; her name is Ellen."

"And, may I ask your name, before you go any further?" enquired Marian.

"Certainly," replied the stranger, bowing. "My name is Alan and, as I live close to Dale Castle, people call me Alan-a-Dale. For a considerable while there were no two happier lovers than Ellen and myself, but a young

Norman baron came upon the scene and he fell deeply in love with my Ellen: his name is Baron de Younglove. At first, the Baron was merely received into Ellen's house as an ordinary guest: but he is rich and Ellen's father has recently fallen upon evil times. As a result, Younglove has offered to give the father a thousand marks if he may wed his daughter."

"To think," protested Marian, "that a Saxon father should sell his daughter to a Norman for a thousand marks! It is disgraceful."

"Well," added Alan, "he has agreed, and the reason I am so wretched is that the wedding is to take place to-morrow."

"How awful!" broke in Marian.

Robin smiled. "And how can we help you?" he asked.

"The only thing that can be done is to stop the wedding. I think I know who you are," said Alan. "Are you not Robin Hood?"

"Yes, that is my name, and this lady is Marian," answered Robin.

Alan bowed to Marian and continued, "There is only one man who could hope to stop the ceremony and you are the man. That is why I feel that our chance meeting is a very lucky one for me."

Robin looked thoughtful for a minute.

"Does the lady wish for the marriage or is she merely compelled by her father?" he enquired.

"My friend," replied Alan, with emphasis, "she is heartbroken, but can think of no way out of the dilemma."

"Very well," said Robin, "it shall be done, somehow."

Alan was overjoyed.

"But there is a price," continued Robin, "and the price is that you shall join our little band of outlaws, if Ellen is willing. She would be good company for Marian, no doubt."

Marian clapped her hands and said it would be lovely, while Alan danced about on the grass, unable to control his joy.

Just as the light was failing, three people walked into the outlaws' encampment. Robin, with Marian on his

arm, introduced his new friend, Alan, to the men, and then he sat down to think out the plans for the morrow.

Next day, the bells of Dale Abbey were ringing lustily and the little abbey itself was crammed full of men and women, who were anxious to be present at the ceremony. Many, in fact, were turned away, as the sacred edifice was quickly filled to overflowing. There never had been shown such interest in a wedding in the village before, and perhaps the reason may be guessed.

Presently, there was a cheer as the bride arrived, accompanied by her father She was a beautiful girl, with eyes of wondrous lustre; but it was evident to all that tears had been coursing down her cheeks through most of the previous night.

To the father's astonishment, an unkempt man pushed himself between the daughter and parent. The father looked at him angrily.

"Sir," quoth the unkempt fellow, "I come to bring the maiden luck," and with that the three walked up the aisle where they were met by none other than the Bishop of Hereford. The Bishop seemed puzzled, while Baron de Younglove was clearly annoyed. What did this loafing fellow want? In less than a minute, the plot was made clear.

"Stand on one side, Baron," commanded the unknown fellow and, throwing off the dusty cloak which enveloped him, there stood Robin Hood in a beautiful suit of Lincoln green. His actions served as a signal and, at the same moment, forty men who were sitting among the congregation divested themselves in a like manner. Three-quarters of those present were Robin's men!

Our Lord Bishop of Hereford nervously looked towards the open porch, and to his amazement, saw that the way was barred by six men in Lincoln green, each of which was armed with a bow. As he was looking, the six men made way for two new-comers. They were Alan-a-Dale and Little John. Along the aisle came the two and Alan took up a position close to Ellen. The look of wonderment which passed over her face as Alan appeared was beyond description.

All was now ready for Robin's plans. In a clear voice.

he said, "My Lord Bishop of Hereford, I, Robin Hood, command you to perform this ceremony of marriage; but, before you begin, request the maiden to select the man she wishes to take for husband, for better or for worse. Fail in your duty and my men, here, will perform *their unpleasant task unflinchingly.*"

The Bishop said nothing for quite a minute and, then, he whispered something to Ellen. It is not known what he said, but Ellen turned to Alan-a-Dale, with a smile.

"It must not be: it cannot be," stammered the Bishop.

"Very well, then," answered Robin, "you stand aside," and with that he was pushed into a corner and his robes taken from him. As quick as lightning, Friar Tuck appeared as from nowhere and, with Robin's aid, put on the vestments.

The ceremony was performed and Alan-a-Dale became the happiest man in the world. What happened to Baron de Younglove, nobody really knows. What is known, however, is that Ellen's father did not receive the thousand marks, although he was in no wise responsible for the turn of events.

CHAPTER X

SAVING THE WIDOW'S THREE SONS

IF the Sheriff was ever in a bad-tempered mood, he was so when he reached Nottingham after having been Robin's guest at the forest camp. For one thing, he had lost a goodly sum of money—that, of course, did not please him. Then he felt that his dignity had been interfered with—and, of course, that did not please him. But, worst of all, the thing that upset him most was the fact that everybody seemed to know all about the incidents, even before he reached Nottingham himself. Bad news, the proverb says, travels quickly; and it certainly did in this case; for, as soon as he entered the town gateway, the door-keeper touched his cap and said he was glad that things had been no worse. And when he entered the castle apartments, the Bishop of Hereford advised him to apprehend Robin Hood for theft and assault.

The Sheriff would have preferred to forget all about the incidents, but his well-meaning friends prevented him doing so. He wanted to think no more about the business because he was, naturally, ashamed at being trapped by Robin. And, of course, it was greed that led him into the trap.

It is clear, then, that the Sheriff was forced to take some action. What he did was to post a proclamation throughout the town stating that the authorities would pay a still higher price for Robin Hood's head. The price cannot be stated here, because history has not recorded it; but we do know that all the most daring men in the King's army at Nottingham thought it a princely sum and one well-worth securing. As a result, a band of the most venturesome spirits was gathered together with the sole purpose of securing the money.

Accordingly, within a month of the amusing feast at

which the Sheriff was an unwilling guest, a body of picked men set out for the forest stronghold belonging to Robin, determined to win the prize.

It was unfortunate that Robin was not at home when the King's men descended on the neighbourhood. He had gone forth early in the morning to sit with a friendly Saxon who lay dying. However, when the little army approached, the outlawed men in Lincoln green thought it best to make a surprise attack on their unwanted visitors.

The attack was all but successful. It just failed in one particular. Unfortunately, one of Robin's men, named Will the Wrestler, tripped over a log as he was escaping from the clutches of six stout soldiers. They pounced on him immediately and pinned him to the ground. There were two of his brothers, Lester and Harry, taking part in the fray and, when they saw Will's plight, they rushed to his assistance. As a result, all three were caught. To catch three of Robin's men was a feat of which anyone could be proud. Consequently, the soldiers put a strong guard over the prisoners and prepared to return to Nottingham.

The Sheriff's joy can be imagined. At last, he was able to serve Robin's little band in the way he wanted. The men should have no mercy: they should be hanged where all could see the hanging and, then, a public holiday should be proclaimed. Thus, the Sheriff intended to make an example of them.

But what pleased the Sheriff was not calculated to please Robin, and, when the latter returned home, tired and weary, the news about the capture of the three men upset him considerably. He wondered what it would be best to do, and all sorts of plans ran through his mind. While he was thinking hard, an old woman came and asked to see Robin. The woman was a poor widow and it was her three sons who had been taken prisoners. News had been brought to her that the Sheriff had decided that the three should die the next morning. Imagine the poor woman's distress! Her reason for coming to Robin was to beg him to do something to save her boys. Naturally, Robin needed no exhortation from the old

lady: he was only too anxious to save them, as they were his loyal friends.

As soon as he had done his best in comforting the widow, and she had departed, a very dirty palmer came along. Palmers were men who went about praying and preaching and this particular palmer had come to pray for the safety of the three condemned men. The sight of the man gave Robin an idea.

"Give me your cloak and pointed hat," he said, "and I will give you fifty pieces of silver."

The palmer told Robin that it was wrong to mock him and make fun of him because of his soiled clothes. "After all," said he, "you judge a man by his heart and not by what he wears."

With some difficulty, Robin explained to the holy man that he was in earnest and serious, and that he was prepared to buy his clothes at the price stated.

"Whatever for?" enquired the palmer.

Robin put his finger to his lips as though to suggest a secret and, then, explained that he was setting out almost at once for Nottingham, and the clothes would help to make an admirable disguise.

Early on the following morning a wretched-looking palmer entered Nottingham by the south gate. His pointed hat was pulled well over his eyes and the dirt on his clothing suggested many weary miles of tramping along dusty roads.

"Where's the hanging to take place?" enquired the man of prayers of the gate-keeper.

"Find out," came the churlish reply.

The palmer shrugged his shoulders and passed on. It did not require a great deal of searching to find out where the triple drama was to be enacted, for the spot was already crowded with idle folk who were anxious to find amusement in the miseries of others. The palmer sighed at the spectacle.

Presently, a man in a very smart uniform came bustling along. Evidently, he was concerned with the arrangements of the drama that was about to take place. The palmer addressed himself to the high official.

"Kind Sire," he said in a whimpering voice, "may I ask who is the hangman to-day?"

"Don't bother me," came the gruff reply, "I have enough to prepare without attending to the requests of people such as you. If you want to know, find out from the Sheriff. He is coming along in a moment."

Sure enough, along came the Sheriff in a few minutes.

"Kind Sire," said the dusty palmer "be so good as to tell me who is to be the hangman?"

The Sheriff stopped short.

"I am searching for a suitable man at this very moment," he said.

"Then, High Sheriff," whined the palmer, "give me leave to earn the hangman's fee."

The Sheriff seemed pleased, because he had already asked several men to perform the gruesome task and all had excused themselves, in one way or another. As a matter of fact, a rumour had spread around that Robin Hood intended to wreak vengeance on anyone who acted as hangman and this had deterred them.

"Are you experienced in the work?" queried the Sheriff.

"Oh, yes, Sire," replied the palmer, "I am often chosen for the office, since my calling of palmer enables me to invest my duties with holiness."

"Good," exclaimed the Sheriff, "prepare for the business and see that you act the part with dignity."

"Right pleased will you be with my performance," said the dusty, dirty man, making a low bow. With that, he attended to some minor instructions which Nottingham's chief official gave him, and then stood by the scaffold waiting for the victims.

Soon, the three brothers were brought out of the castle and led to the scaffold. From their countenances, it was perfectly clear that they had prepared themselves for the worst. It would have been a very tragic sight had not the events which ensued been so remarkably amusing.

The palmer walked to each man, in turn, and whispered to him the usual words of comfort, which was a common practice, in those days. At least, that is what he appeared to be doing. Really, what he said was this: "Take cheer, I am Robin Hood: be prepared to fight your way through the crowd, and flee to the south gate." Neither Will,



"Sheriff," he cried in a ringing voice, "hanging is an unholy thing which I am here to prevent"

nor Lester, nor Harry showed any trace of surprise; they stood there immobile.

Everything was ready, but the palmer, instead of proceeding with his gruesome duties, divested himself of his rags and displayed a smart suit of Lincoln green.

"Sheriff," he cried in a ringing voice, "hanging is an unholy thing which I am here to prevent," and with that he blew on his bugle and a vast array of men in Lincoln green suddenly sprang up, as from nowhere.

Robin handed his three prisoners a weapon a piece and the four jumped down from the scaffold, and rushed into the bewildered crowd. Few people cared to stand up against the well-armed foe and, though the Sheriff shouted a score of times, "Apprehend the villains," hardly a soul did more than shrink from the coats of green. It was an easy matter for every one of the outlawed band to find his way to the south gate, which had been previously decided upon as the *rendezvous*.

For a moment, the Sheriff thought there was still a hope of capturing the men. The keeper would surely close the gates when he saw the rabble approaching. But, once again, our unworthy official was wrong. Robin Hood seldom made mistakes, and his plans were always laid carefully. At the south gate, he had posted Alan-a-Dale and Little John. These two worthy men had arrived, in disguise, and waited close to the lodge occupied by the gate-keeper. There they had loitered all the while the proceedings had been taking place on the Castle Square. The moment they heard the shouts of the commotion, they rushed up to the keeper who had time only to exclaim "What's that?" Immediately, they snatched his keys, pushed him into his little lodge and locked him in.

Then, Alan stood at the gate and counted the men as they ran through. One by one, they came and reached safety by crossing the drawbridge. Robin Hood was the last to arrive. He was panting and laughing, though the enemy was at his heels. With a deft swing, Alan slammed the gate in the face of the Sheriff's right hand man: he turned the key in the lock and crossed the bridge.

All were safe and the widow's three sons were conducted back to the forest encampment in triumph.

CHAPTER XI

AN ENCOUNTER WITH GUY OF GISBORNE

It must not be thought that the Sheriff of Nottingham was the only thorn in Robin's side. Certainly there was, at least, one other Norman of high degree who ravaged the Saxons and who gave Robin much anxiety He was Guy of Gisborne.

To crown the misdeeds of this rascally chief, Guy had taken the opportunity of descending upon Gamewell Hall in Robin's absence and killing most of the occupants. Marian was away at the time, and thus preserved her life: but poor Roger had to face the attackers with a handful of retainers They fought valiantly against superior odds, but were shot down one by one In the end, Roger was killed.

Gamewell Hall was one of the finest abodes in all that part of England and Guy now decided to make it his headquarters Accordingly, he strengthened the fortifications and effected certain alterations, here and there. Otherwise, the new owner lived in it exactly as his predecessor had done.

Naturally, Robin Hood was angered more than he had ever been before Fortunately for him, his band of followers had grown considerably and his strength was very much enhanced As may be expected, he vowed that he would teach Guy a lesson but the remarkable thing was that Guy had made up his mind to do exactly the same thing to Robin. Thus, an encounter at an early date was assured.

Robin knew exactly what was in Guy's mind and he determined to strike first. Accordingly, a raid was planned for a certain night. Preparations were made with unusual thoroughness and every man knew the part he had to play.

On the night selected, a most comical procession set

out from the forest stronghold. There was Friar Tuck, seated on a donkey, leading a group of well-armed men. Robin marched on one side of him and Little John on the other. One would never have thought that a mission fraught with such danger was in contemplation, for most of the journey was spent in joking—the jokes centring mostly around the rotund proportions of the portly friar and the beast upon which he was perched.

But, when the lights of Gamewell Hall could be seen, silence was observed and the party of some sixty odd men progressed without causing a sound. Soon, the moat of the Hall was reached. Here Robin expected to find his greatest obstacle; but, to his astonishment, he found it dry. Guy had taken no trouble to repair the leaks which always occur in such artificial constructions and the water had all trickled away, little by little.

"Slice of luck, number one," whispered Friar Tuck, in his humorous manner.

The men noiselessly crossed the moat and hoisted two of the company over a weak part of the oak fencing. These men crawled forward and put their ears to the ground, in the manner which we generally associate with Red Indians. Soon, they returned and reported that Guy was within the Hall, in the company of many men—perhaps half a hundred. They seem to have been feasting and are now drinking, they said.

"Drinking!" exclaimed Friar Tuck. "Slice of luck, number two."

Then, a fellow who had been exploring by himself, crept back and said that Guy was quarrelling violently with an officer.

"Quarrelling," said Friar Tuck. "Slice of luck, number three."

Presently, Friar Tuck decided to force his way through the fencing; but, being of stout dimensions, became wedged and could not move.

"I'm wedged," he said imploringly to those who were waiting to follow him. "Come and release me."

A whisper was heard—nobody knew from where it came. "Wedged! Slice of luck, number four."

Friar Tuck pretended not to hear the remark.

One at a time, the stout posts of the fencing were uprooted, until a wide gap had been made, through which Robin's men passed, silently.

Then, Robin told his retinue to gather round the doorway while he knocked and demanded admittance. Though forty to fifty men had arranged themselves within a few feet of the gate, not even the sound of their breathing could be heard by the lodge-keeper, when he answered Robin's knocks. And, as the night was as black as ink, he could not see a soul.

"What is it you require?" asked the keeper, as he peered through the iron grille, at the man who stood without.

"I demand admittance and my name is Robin Hood," came the reply.

The keeper was dumbfounded. He rushed in and told Guy what had happened. Guy looked amused and pleased.

"Bid the gentleman enter," he commanded. "If he cares to run his head into a noose, that's his look out," he added.

"But," urged the servant. "He can't have come here for any good purpose. Had he not better stay where he is?"

But Guy was excited with drinking: he rose up and, in a voice of thunder, cried "Admit him, dolt."

The servant did as he was told: he opened the door and in strode Robin; but Robin was not alone. The forty or fifty picked followers burst into the Hall with their master.

What a scene of commotion! Guy was prepared, first, to parley with Robin in a lofty, insulting manner and, then, to make him a prisoner. But the sight of a whole band of foresters put a very different complexion on the situation. Guy rose up, in horror and astonishment.

"Slay the fellow," he cried; but many of the soldiers were drowsy with wine and some were sleeping. A few of his followers rallied round him and, cautiously, they backed to the corner of the Hall where a better stand could be made.

A terrible struggle ensued. Guy's men were skilled with sword and battle-axe, which were more useful weapons

in such an onslaught than the bows and quarter-staves wielded by Robin's followers. Still, the foresters were fit and fresh; moreover, they fought with a knowledge that their cause was just. In this way, they gradually gained advantages.

As we have said, it was night-time, and it must be recognised that houses in those days were ill-lighted. One by one, the lamps were overturned and extinguished by the movements of the men and their weapons. A time came when the sole remaining lamp was knocked over and, then, the only light was provided by the log fire. Unfortunately, Robin's men were between the forces of Guy and the hearth. Thus, while Guy was able to recognise Robin's silhouette, Robin could see nothing. This gave Guy the opportunity he desired: under the cloak of darkness, he slipped through a side-door and escaped, leaving his men to fare as best they could.

The fighting proceeded and, then, suddenly there was a flare: in a few seconds, the whole building was alight. It must be recognised that in those days, most edifices other than churches were built very largely of wood which became extremely dry after standing a few years. In addition, the floors were strewn with rushes, instead of being covered with carpets. Presumably, an overturned lamp set the rushes alight and the flames rose up and caught the wooden panels and beams.

It was a terrible conflagration which lit up the sky for miles around. People at a distance who saw it, quaked and said that the end of the world was at hand. The two opposing forces ran for safety and, for awhile, forgot their differences. A few of Robin's men were wounded and were carried back to their home in the forest. When Robin fully appreciated that Guy had run away, he saw little use in carrying on the encounter and his men were commanded to cease hostilities and return home.

So ended the fortunes of Gamewell Hall. No building has ever been erected on the site since and there are people who point out the spot, saying that no tree will grow on it.

CHAPTER XII

A FRIGHT FOR LITTLE JOHN

THE first round between the Lord of Gisborne and Robin had not favoured Guy: but the latter was by no means rebuffed and he intended to try his hand and his wits a second time. When he had escaped from Gamewell Hall, he lost no time in finding his way to Nottingham and, there, he had a long discussion with his friend the Sheriff.

The Sheriff was glad that Guy proposed to take no rest until he had subdued Robin and he did all in his power in urging him on. He would lend him as many soldiers as he liked and he could have weapons without stint. Guy did not look upon a massed attack with any favour. He said that the only way to capture Robin was by craft and subterfuge. In his opinion, the best plan would be to treat Robin to some of his own medicine, by which he meant that as Robin invariably brought off his own successes by disguise, he too would adopt a disguise and so capture the troublesome forester.

Accordingly, one fine day Guy of Gisborne disguised himself most cunningly and set off from Nottingham in the direction of Lockesley, armed with a bow and the Sheriff's blessing.

It so happened that, on the very same day, Will Scarlet and Little John had business to transact in Nottingham, and it is with their part of the story we must now deal.

The two hardy men stepped out at a brisk pace and soon reached the town; but, just before passing through the gate, they decided to separate, assuming that two unknown men might give rise to suspicion, whereas two individuals apart would cause no questions.

Will made his way to a cloth merchant and ordered several yards of green material. The merchant sold him the cloth and, immediately after, went across to the Castle

and told the Sheriff that he suspected his customer to be one of Robin's men. The Sheriff was, naturally, aroused and, calling six of his trusty servants, set off to catch up the mysterious customer.

After Will had gone a little way, he happened to turn round and, then, he saw his pursuers for the first time. They were almost on his heels and the position appeared serious. It was not a habit of Will's to run for his life; but on this occasion he used discretion: he flung the roll of cloth at the nearest fellow, which brought him down with a bang and, then, set off at lightning pace.

Now let us turn to Little John. He had entered a shop close to the gate and, just as he was leaving it, Will ran past like a flash with the Sheriff and five men panting along behind. In a second, Will had passed through the arch of the gate and was, then, making for the hillside. By standing under the arch, Little John could get a good view of all that was happening. He saw Will manfully striding up the hill. Would he be able to outdistance his pursuers? Yes, thought Little John, if he can maintain the pace. But, what is happening? Will suddenly pulls up.

"He is lost," exclaimed Little John to himself. "He will be caught."

Then Little John could hardly believe his eyes. Will turned round, took good aim with his bow and sent an arrow through the heart of the nearest man. A second's interval was all that elapsed and another arrow whizzed through the air. That, too, claimed a victim. Like a flash, Will turned, galloped over the brow of the hill and was lost among the trees.

Little John's excitement at seeing the whole drama unfold itself before his eyes had made him forget himself.

"Jolly good, jolly good," he shouted and, before he knew what he was doing, he had thrown his hat into the air.

The enraged Sheriff had given up the chase a few paces outside the town gate and, thus, was standing, looking on, not far from John. On hearing the words, he turned and said "What's jolly good?"

One look for the Sheriff was sufficient to tell him that

Little John was another of Robin's followers. "Catch him, hold him, stop him," yelled the Sheriff and, unluckily for John, the gate-keeper was standing behind him. John turned to flee, but the keeper felled him to the ground. Up ran the Sheriff and those that were left of the pursuers. They grabbed Little John and bound him with cords, securely.

"I'll show you what's jolly good," hissed the Sheriff. "A hanging is as good as anything and a hanging you shall have, now, immediately, on the summit of the hill, on the very spot where murder has just been done."

It really looked as though the Sheriff had, at last, scored a victory, for how could Little John hope for any chance of escape? He was bound hand and foot, and not a soul among his friends would know of his plight until he had paid the penalty.

"To-day is the thirteenth of the month," Little John said in his most polite manner to the Sheriff, "and they do say that any violence committed on such days brings bad luck to those who do the deed."

"Then, go and tell that to your friend who is so free with his bow and arrows," sneered the Sheriff.

"It is the Sheriff's commands," said Little John to the men who were holding him in a grip of iron, "that you permit me to go in search of my friend and tell him that he is in for a slice of bad luck."

"Frightfully funny, aren't you," sneered the Sheriff. "Perhaps you will still be funny when you are hanging on a tree over there," and he pointed to a big, outspread oak.

The Sheriff was in his most aggressive mood and he was determined that a victory should be won over Robin's forces on this occasion. "Drag him up the hill," he commanded, and poor old John was propelled along the path up the hill in a most unceremonious manner.

"Climb up this tree," he said to one of the servants, "slip a rope over that branch and let it hang down." Then, turning to another servant, he said, "You tie it round the villain's neck," and addressing himself again to the first man, he continued, "And, when I give the command, you tighten the rope."

The two men carried out their instructions and, by then, Little John was completely resigned to an unhappy fate. "Well," he thought to himself, "I've had a good run for my money, so I must not complain. I have done some bad things in my life and some good ones. It is a pity I have not tried a little harder to do more good ones."

Just as he was prepared for the end, there was the sound of a horn. "What's that?" they all thought.

The Sheriff knew and smiled. His eyes sparkled. "Yes," he said, sarcastically, "the thirteenth seems to be an unlucky day for Master Robin's forces." Then, turning to Little John, he continued, "It may interest you to know, before you die, that that sound is a signal that Guy of Gisborne has captured Robin Hood, and, as likely as not, he will be hanging on this tree with you within an hour."

Little John was a man of resource. "Oh, then, hang me quickly," he said, as though he had suddenly become very impatient.

The Sheriff looked at him curiously. "Why?" he asked.

"Because it would be a terrible thing if we were both hanged at the same time. Get me over and done with before he arrives. Quick, get on with it."

The Sheriff pictured in his mind the glorious scene of two enemies being strung up in a tree at the same time. It would be a sight to remember.

"Unloose the villain," he cried suddenly, "and stand guard over him until My Lord Gisborne arrives with Robin."

Little John almost chuckled. "Here's luck," he thought. "The silly old fellow has given me the respite I played for. If I can't think of some scheme now, it's my own fault."

We must leave the present scene in which the Sheriff is standing on a point of vantage, scouring the country-side in search of Guy, whilst Little John, with his back to a tree, is guarded over by two men who know not whether to be apprehensive or jubilant, and turn to the meeting of Guy and Robin Hood.

As we have already explained, Guy had disguised himself so remarkably well that his own brother would not have known him, and, then, had gone in search of Robin. By one of those curious circumstances that fate occasionally

provides, Guy and Robin met almost as soon as the Norman had set out from Nottingham.

"Good morning," said Guy to the wayfarer.

"Good morning," returned Robin.

And, then the two men talked amiably about the weather, the crops, and other commonplace things. It was Guy's desire to glean all the information he could about the band of foresters.

"Have you seen any of Robin's men in these parts, lately?" he enquired, as though he were merely gossiping.

"Can't say I have," replied Robin.

So, the conversation proceeded, until at last Guy turned to the man he was confronting and said, "I verily believe you are one of Robin's underlings."

"You are absolutely mistaken," replied Robin, "and I can assure you, on my honour, that I definitely am not."

Guy was reassured but somewhat puzzled.

"Then, if you know nothing of the priceless outlaw and are not one of his men, you can go, for I have no use for you," he said.

Robin was a little startled by the changed attitude of the man he had met.

"Even though I may be nobody," retorted Robin, "there is no earthly reason why you should be rude. In fact, had you been civil, I could do quite a lot for you."

"Such as what?" queried Guy.

"Well, for one thing, it is quite possible that I could show you Robin Hood in the flesh."

"You could!" exclaimed Guy. "Well, then, you are the very man I wanted to meet."

Robin showed very plainly by his attitude that he was not going to give any assistance, unless Guy made himself far more friendly. Guy was quick to notice this and became confidential.

"You'd never guess who I am," he said.

"No, perhaps I cannot," retorted Robin, as if he did not care, although he was burning with the desire to know.

"My name is Guy of Gisborne," he replied, drawing himself up to his full height, "and, if you will assist me to find this Robin, I will give you treasure more than you have ever seen."

"Oh, is that so," said Robin, bluntly. "Now, you want to see Robin," he continued, "tell me, pray, what you propose to do when you do see him? I am asking because it is well known that he is a man of strength and resource, and he may very well kill you."

"Kill me," sneered the haughty Guy, "not likely. The boot, Sir, will be on the other foot."

Robin eyed the speaker from head to foot.

"Suppose, for instance," he said, "that Robin summons his men and you are faced with a whole band of them. What then?"

"Ah!" said Guy, with a smile, "I merely blow one long and two short blasts on this silver horn and the Sheriff arrives with a strong guard of soldiers. It's just what I want to happen."

"I see," said Robin, "one long and two short blasts, and there we are. Is that it?"

"Exactly," replied Guy.

"Very well, then," went on Robin, "so that your wish may come true, without delay, let me introduce myself."

Snatching off his hat, which served as disguise, he said, "Robin Hood, at your service."

Guy looked uneasy. Suddenly, a rush of anger overwhelmed him: he drew his sword and slashed at Robin's head. Fortunately, for Robin, he had learnt at the very outset of his career that to take one's eyes off an adversary is fatal Thus, he saw, in good time, just what Guy intended to do. He ducked his head and the sword passed wildly over him. A second, a third and many more attacks were avoided in much the same way.

There was only one thing for Robin to do and that was to use his sword in reply. Then, the two were madly thrusting at each other. It was a fearful moment: but Robin suddenly darted forward and Guy fell, pierced through the heart.

Our hero looked at his victim in sorrow; but was suddenly startled by seeing Will waving to him in the distance. Will, it must be explained had halted when he escaped from the Sheriff and, then, had crawled back to the summit of the hill. From there, he had seen all that had happened with relation to Little John. As soon as

he had appreciated how dangerous was his position, he had darted off for assistance and it was at this point that he had waved to Robin.

There was not a second to waste. Robin grabbed the outer garments which had disguised Guy and, hastily donning them, he blew the bugle once long and twice short. Then, he and Will raced off to Little John's assistance. When they neared the spot, Robin held Will by the wrist and collar, as though he were a captive, and in this manner they approached the waiting Sheriff.

The Sheriff saw them coming and clapped his hands in glee. "Two hangings in one day is not bad sport," he shouted. Naturally, he supposed that he was speaking to Guy; but judge of his surprise when the supposed Guy threw off his cloak and revealed none other than Robin Hood.

The Sheriff shouted to his men and a hand to hand struggle ensued. Little John was freed of his fetters and the three foresters put up a fight that their adversaries did not soon forget. Meanwhile, the guards at the Castle had been told of the encounter and it was not until overwhelming numbers came rushing up that Robin, John and Will thought fit to retire.

There were no hangings on the fine old oak tree that day.

CHAPTER XIII

ROBIN AND MARIAN

Now that Gamewell Hall had been reduced to ashes and Roger was dead, Will Gamewell elected to join Robin's band of foresters, and Marian had no real home. True, she spent most of her time at the forest encampment, where her duties consisted in mending and making clothes, and in superintending the cooking of foods ; but, nevertheless, her position was ill-defined.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Robin loved her very dearly. For a long time, he had wanted to marry her, but he had felt that the dangerous life he led, did not justify him in asking her to marry him. While Gamewell Hall existed, he thought it far better that she should live there in comparative safety, and tend to the wants of Roger who was growing old and needed the comforting presence of Marian.

But Roger had passed away, Gamewell Hall had gone, and, as far as he was concerned, life was not so hazardous, since the encampment had been formed and the number of followers increased.

Thus, things had changed and Robin felt that the time had come when Marian should be his bride. Marian, for her part, welcomed the idea. Ever since she had known Robin, she had admired his manly qualities and this admiration had grown into love. To her, there was nobody in the world like him.

So, one evening in spring, when the trees were clothed in fresh green leaves, Robin spoke to Marian about his feelings. Marian was overjoyed and, for that matter, so was Robin at her answer.

Friar Tuck was called and told that the two were desirous of being married. Could he make the necessary arrangements and perform the ceremony ? Yes, Friar Tuck thought



An arrow came whizzing through the air and narrowly missed Marian.

he could: moreover, few things would give him greater pleasure than to unite such a loving couple.

Now, for the purposes of outlaws, it would have been sufficient for the ceremony to have taken place in the encampment, without any special preparations. But neither Robin nor Marian would have been satisfied with such a ceremony. They wanted a real wedding.

A mile away from the camp was a grove of trees which Friar Tuck had often admired. The trees stood erect and in line, but their branches curved over at the tops and formed a canopy of leaves against the clear sky. It was a formation which reminded the Friar of the pillars and the tracery roof of a cathedral, but it was made by God and not by man. Here, he thought, would be a fit setting for the ceremony.

Accordingly, Friar Tuck took a number of men with him and they spent several hours in preparing the site for the great event. Early on the appointed morning, he and his helpers carried such articles to the spot as they deemed would serve as altar, pulpit, and so on.

While these arrangements were being made, Marian had not been idle. Assisted by her good friend, Ellen, she had made a robe of white which set off her natural charms admirably. It was a remarkable sight to see Marian, in her wedding dress, being escorted through the woods to the natural cathedral by Alan-a-Dale and others: while, at the same time, Robin, with Little John, was making his way there by another route. All told, there were over a hundred men, dressed in their best, who filed into the place of worship.

The ceremony began. If anything, it was more impressive than the usual wedding ceremony. The ring was produced and slipped on Marian's finger. A hymn was sung without the accompaniment of an organ. The rendering was rich and full bodied, being sung heartily by men with manly voices. The sounds travelled far across the still air and died away with the concluding "Amen."

Robin kissed his bride—Marian was now his wife. At this moment, the spirit of peace was shattered. An arrow came whizzing through the air and narrowly missed Marian.

Whoever had intruded upon such a scene with weapons of death must have indeed been heartless!

Robin turned white when he saw how barely the arrow had missed his wife, and then his colour heightened. "Death to the villain," he cried. With that, he sprang away from Marian and rushed in the direction whence the missile had come. It was one of the rare occasions that Robin was unarmed; but he did not stop to think of that. He dashed through the trees, followed by most of the congregation. To his amazement, not a hundred yards away was a strong band of the Sheriff's men, carefully lined up and ready for any attack.

At this point, it is necessary to break off the thread of the story and speak of the Sheriff. Little John's escape from being hanged had annoyed this haughty gentleman far more than might be imagined, and he had vowed vengeance.

This vengeance took the form of a well-planned expedition against Robin's forces, and, by a curious turn of fate, the day selected was the very day chosen for Robin's wedding. The Sheriff had set out with his soldiers early in the morning and, though he did not expect to locate the spot where Robin's encampment lay, he thought it more than likely that he might waylay some of his men.

As it happened, two of the Sheriff's scouts had had their attention drawn to an unusual sight—a lady in white! On closer investigation, they found that she belonged to Robin's party. This incident and the sounds of singing had made it easy for the Sheriff to array his forces where Robin now discovered them.

Since men do not go to weddings armed to the teeth, it looked for a while as though the Sheriff might gain a victory and annihilate Robin's forces, for not more than a dozen of Robin's men had weapons of any kind.

But, as usual, the Sheriff made one blunder and that was to line up his soldiers in the open, while Robin's were screened by the thick trunks of the trees.

A few hasty commands from Robin set his men in a long battle line and the dozen archers were posted at irregular intervals along the line. Each archer was supplied with arrows by helpers and, when one grew

fatigued, another stepped into his place without a second's loss of time. Thus, the firing proceeded at a furious pace and the Sheriff concluded that the effective force against him was considerably greater than it really was. Moreover, there never were any archers to equal those of Robin's and, in addition, they were sheltered. Thus, on all accounts, the outlaws acquitted themselves very well.

When the battle had proceeded for more than an hour, an arrow flew straight at the Sheriff: he ducked his head and it tore his hat asunder. This was becoming too much of a good thing for him: he wheeled his horse round and galloped away, leaving his men on foot to fare as best they could. This was the signal for a general retreat and the soldiers soon melted away. Robin had, once more, gained the day.

The outlaws called to Robin, asking permission to follow up the rabble; but Robin remembered how Harold threw away a victory, and commanded his men to stay where they were. After all, it was Robin's wedding day.

CHAPTER XIV

LITTLE JOHN COMES TO THE RESCUE

LITTLE John, the tall hero of many thrilling encounters, was one of those fellows who never lost his temper. When most of us would frown, he might be seen in roars of laughter. Thus it was that although the Sheriff had come near to hanging him, he bore the man no grudge really, and, when others said he ought to go and kill the Sheriff, he merely grinned and said that, one day, he would pay him back in his own way.

A time came when Little John told his friends that he had a brilliant scheme for annoying the Sheriff, just to pay him back for making him look so silly under that forbidding oak tree. What the scheme was, he would not divulge, but he promised to be back within three weeks or a month.

Accordingly, early one fine morning, Little John set out, carrying the bow with which he drew so straight an arrow, and dressed in the clothes of an ordinary working man. He strode along the road merrily, and eventually reached the town gate. He was careful to pass through at a time when others were going to and fro, in order to cause as little notice as possible.

Once in the town, there was really no reason why anyone should suspect his relationship to Robin. Thus, he was free to stroll about at will. John had chosen this particular day for going to Nottingham because a grand shooting match was to be held, and he thought to himself, if Robin can get some fun out of these matches, why shouldn't he ?

Little John set down his name as a competitor and, by and by, the shooting began. Now, as everybody knows, the Sheriff was a man who took violent dislikes to people, and among those who competed, there was a man whom the Sheriff hated with no uncertain hate.

This particular fellow happened to be a tolerable shot

with the bow; at least, he was much better than the average. Thus it came about that, when he let fly his six arrows, his score was higher than any of the previous entrants. To see him hitting the bull or the outer ring each time made the Sheriff angry, especially as there was only one man more to fire, and he was not likely to beat the fellow, as nobody had ever heard of him before.

While in this mood, the Sheriff looked intently at the last man to stand on the mark and face the butts. Though he did not suspect it, he had met the man before: it was Little John.

We, who know something of Little John, would expect him to shoot his arrows in splendid fashion. As a matter of fact, they were even better than that: they were perfect. When all six arrows had struck the target, the marker called out the score and Little John's score topped the list.

The Sheriff led the cheering and lost no time in congratulating the unknown fellow.

"What is thy name fellow and whither come you?" he enquired.

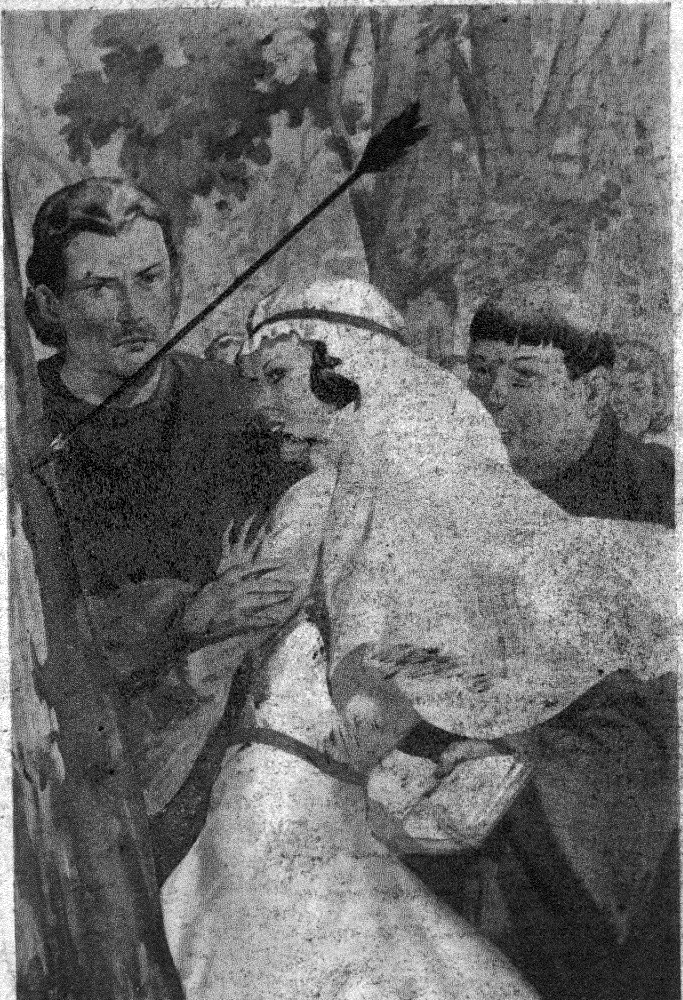
"My name, great Sire," said Little John, "is Greenleaf and I hale from Barnsdale."

With that the Sheriff presented Greenleaf with the prize, which was a cask of strong ale. Greenleaf, as we shall now call him, looked at the cask and wondered what use it could be to him. An idea came to him. He called to the surging crowd, "Now, then, my brothers—because all of you are my brothers—come and enjoy the gift of the good Sheriff," and, with that, he shared the liquor with all those who were ready to drink his health. "And don't forget the health of the Sheriff," he shouted when all were supplied. There were rousing cheers and toasts, and the day's festivities ended amidst universal content.

The Sheriff felt pleased with himself and it was all because the unknown fellow had beaten the man he disliked, and had followed this up by showing such good spirit. He called Greenleaf to him.

"Tell me all about yourself," he said, with interest.

"Well, Sire," replied the man, "There is not much to tell. I used to work in Barnsdale on a farm; but my master died and, then, I lost my job."



An arrow . . . narrowly missed Marian.

[see page 76

" Are you out of work now ? " he enquired.

" Sure, Sire, I am."

" Then, would you like a position in my pantry ? I have just had a man leave and you might very well do his work," said the Sheriff.

" Oh, thank ye kindly," stammered Greenleaf, " it is right good of you, Sire." And almost before Greenleaf knew where he was, he was working in the Sheriff's pantry.

Greenleaf, or Little John, felt rather nonplussed. He had entered on this little expedition with the sole object of annoying the Sheriff : but how could he do that, since the Sheriff had treated him so fairly ? He would have much preferred to have courted his displeasure : then, he could have had some amusement at his master's expense.

Accordingly, Greenleaf did his work from day to day, which consisted in preparing meat and vegetables for the cook. It was a monotonous life and he wondered how it would all end. The other servants were a surly lot, always quarrelling, and, as he was the most recent comer, they spent much of their time in abusing him.

Next to the pantry was the door of the wine cellar, the keeper of which was a man called Reynold. Greenleaf had very little to do with Reynold because he prided himself on judging characters and he was firmly convinced that nobody with two eyes like those of Reynold could possibly be honest.

[illegible] something of a surprise to Greenleaf to hear, one [illegible] the Sheriff was in a towering temper.

" [illegible] for it," said the cook to him.

" I'm for it ; what do you mean ? " asked Greenleaf.

" You'll very soon know," grunted the cook, with a feeling of satisfaction, because someone was about to be scolded.

" I've done nothing," Greenleaf added.

" Oh, yes ; they all say that," murmured the cook.

Soon, Greenleaf was sent for, to appear before the Sheriff. He was ushered into a private room where the Sheriff was holding a sort of court. It appeared that a large quantity of wine had mysteriously disappeared from the cellar, a fact which did not surprise Greenleaf in the least, seeing that Reynold held the keys. But, as may be anticipated,

Reynold denied that he was the culprit: he even went so far as to suggest that the new pantry hand probably knew all about the wine that had disappeared.

The Sheriff turned on Greenleaf and abused him for having come into his establishment and, then, to have acted the part of a thief. Greenleaf was indignant and denied all knowledge of the theft.

"If I stole the wine, then what did I do with it?" he demanded of Reynold.

"Why, you drank it, of course," came the reply.

"But there are three hogsheads gone," added Greenleaf. "Could I possibly drink all that quantity?" he asked.

That was too much for Reynold and he blushed.

"Anyway," said the Sheriff to Greenleaf, "if I catch you stealing my wine again, you shall hang with the next batch of thieves. Now go."

Greenleaf went: but he was determined to make the Sheriff suffer for it. All that day, while he was working in the pantry, he made plans as to what he should do. In the afternoon, there were rumours in the kitchen that something mysterious was in the air The Sheriff had gone out armed to the teeth and all the soldiers were told to be on the alert. What it all meant, nobody seemed to know.

Towards evening, there was a great commotion. Bugles sounded, swords rattled, officers shouted words of command, feet tramped in step, doors banged. Something of real importance must have happened. What could it be? Then, at last, the secret leaked out. The Sheriff had captured Robin Hood and Alan-a-Dale, and had clapped them in prison. On the morrow, early, they were to be hanged.

Now, what do I do? thought Greenleaf. As his work was finished, he sauntered along the stone corridors until he came to the two cells in which Robin and Alan had been placed. Yes, they were there, right enough. He could hear Alan whispering through the wall to Robin, "I'm afraid it is all up this time." Greenleaf passed by, not wishing to stay there and attract attention. What could he do?

Soon, he came to a sort of guard room. There were dozens of keys hanging on the wall, all numbered. A

hurried glance up and down the passage-way showed that nobody was near. He darted inside and grabbed the keys numbered 13 and 14, which were those belonging to the cells occupied by Robin and Alan. Then, to allay suspicion, he picked up two other keys and placed them in the vacant spaces.

So far, so good, thought Greenleaf: now what is the next move? Very soon, the whole place had become quite silent, for everybody else had gone to bed. Stealthily, he crept out of his room and tip-toed along the passages until he reached cells 13 and 14. He placed the keys in the locks and flung open the doors. "Come along my beauties," he said. "Nice thing that I have to lose my sleep just because of you two!"

The two men could see nothing in the dark, but they thought they recognised the voice.

"Is it you, Little John?" they asked.

"No," said Little John, "my name is Greenleaf."

"How comes it . . ." began Robin, but Little John interrupted him.

"You come and don't argue."

Very cautiously, they made their way through passages and across courtyards until they reached the pantry exit. Little John carefully opened the door in the wall which gave on to the open country.

"Just a minute," he said, "I have forgotten something."

Turning back, he beckoned to his two friends.

"Give me a hand, will you?" he asked.

He motioned them to enter a small room with him. It was Reynold's sleeping quarters. Little John threw two keys on the floor—they bore the numbers 13 and 14. Then, under the instructions of Little John, the two men picked up the sleeping body of a servant and carried it gently through the open door. The man muttered something in his sleep and, then, Little John said "one, two, three." With that Robin and Alan threw their burden in the moat. There was a loud splash and, then, all was silent once more.

CHAPTER XV

SIR RICHARD LEA'S DEBT

FOR three whole weeks, Robin and his merry men had taken life quietly. Beyond practising archery in the mornings and sun-bathing in the afternoons—for it was summer time—little had happened. Then, one morning, Robin called his band together.

"We must not allow ourselves to grow stale," he said, "and in order to provide something worth doing, I propose a competition. It is this: Every man is to go straightway out of this camp and return in an hour. The one who best describes what he has seen, on returning, shall receive a prize of thirty pence. I, alone, will remain here."

"Ho! ho!" cried the band, with glee, and in less than no time the place was deserted. The hour passed quickly enough and, then, the searchers returned. Many and various were the tales that were told and, when most of them had been heard, Friar Tuck slowly marched into camp leading a limping horse on which was mounted a very sorry looking Knight.

"Master," exclaimed the Friar, "I found a Knight on horseback who was in tears, and here he is. Do you think I deserve the prize?"

All thought of the competition and the prize immediately vanished from the minds of the onlookers.

"What ails thee, Sir Knight?" asked Robin. "If there is aught that we can do to comfort you, that we will do right gladly, as long as you are sincere and honest."

The Knight bowed dejectedly.

"My story," he said, "is a long one. Two years ago, I was a rich man and, then, troubles heaped themselves on my back. My money was stolen, my herds died and my son fell grievously sick. For his sake and to make him better, I borrowed money from an unworthy minister of the church living in York."

At this point, Friar Tuck coughed and rolled his eyes.

The Knight continued, " My son has completely recovered and for that I am more than glad ; but now the minister tells me that, unless I pay my debts within two months, he will take my lands under a deed of mortgage. I have gone to all my friends and those who profess to love me, and asked them for help ; but all have given me the same reply. They refuse to assist, although some of them possess amazing wealth."

" It's the way of the world," said Robin, " but, first of all, you appear hungry and need food."

With that, he called Marian and asked her to see that a meal fit for a knight was prepared. Marian did as she was bidden and, in a very short while, an excellent dinner was served. The knight ate ravenously and was lavish in his thanks.

After the meal, Robin suggested that the two should discuss business. The sum required was more than Robin could spare ; but, by giving him half the amount in money and half in rich jewels, it was possible to send him away provided for.

The knight was overcome with gratitude.

" You, who have never heard of me before, come to my aid : while those who should be my friends turn away from me," he said. " Why is the world so planned ? "

Before the knight set off for home, he promised to return the loan as soon as he was able.

Near two whole years elapsed. Sir Richard Lea, for that was the name of the knight, had retrieved his fortunes by thrift and good sense, and had resolved to repay the debt which he owed to Robin. But, in addition to the sum due, he proposed to make him a lavish gift in token of his gratitude. The gift consisted of a hundred of the finest bows that skill could provide, a supply of arrows, beautifully carved and silver tipped, and, in addition, a set of fifty of the most elegant suits of green material that one could wish to see. The work entailed in preparing all these things was considerable, and it took many men a great while to make them ready. Thus, several workers in Nottingham were able to add appreciably to their wages

through the generosity of the knight and, indirectly, owing to the kindly action of Robin.

When all was ready, Sir Richard Lea proposed to take the money and the gifts, himself, to Robin. He collected some fifty of his retainers, dressed them in their best, and set out in a sort of regal procession. It was a brave sight—the procession as it moved along the road in the direction of Lockesley.

Sir Richard's course took him through Mansfield and it so happened that, while the men were marching along one of the main streets, they found that a great wrestling match was in progress. There was a huge, noisy crowd and the Knight saw, by chance, that a young fellow was being roughly handled. He stopped to enquire the reason and was told that a prize of a valuable horse with gold trappings was offered to the best all-in wrestler. Now, there were certain well-known professional wrestlers who reckoned to win any prize that was available and they had arranged, beforehand, who should secure the horse. In fact, they took it in turn to win the prizes.

But, unfortunately for their schemes, a young man had come upon the scene and he had proved too much for all the professional wrestlers. By scientific methods, rather than brute force, he had thrown all his adversaries with as much ease as though they had been rubber balls. This, of course, enraged the members of the gang and, when they found that they had lost the coveted horse by fair means, they set to using foul means. They turned in a body on the young man and intended to kill him.

It was just then that Sir Richard arrived on the scene. Being a lover of fair-play, he drove his horse into the mob and called for order. The crowd saw that he was a man of authority and that he had a sufficient force to carry out his commands: accordingly, they listened to him.

He demanded that the gang should choose the best man they could produce and that the unknown competitor should, then, wrestle with him for the prize. All were agreed and, in less than the twinkling of an eye, the professional wrestler was thrown; and this was repeated six times in less than as many minutes. Great was the cheering and the crowd, then, became hostile to the men

who had endeavoured to gain the prize by trickery.

The unknown fellow was presented with the horse and its trappings amidst a great ovation. He vaulted on its back neatly and galloped up to Sir Richard to express his thanks. "I, Will the Wrestler," he said in a ringing voice, "am grateful to you, Sir Knight, for your love of fair play, and with that I doff my cap to you." So saying, he drew off his cap and bowed low.

The Knight then continued his journey and, in course of time, reached the foresters' stronghold. It was not easy to recognise Sir Richard as the man who had come to the encampment all those months earlier, and he was naturally asked what his business was.

"I am Sir Richard Lea," he said, "and I have come to repay a debt that can never be entirely cancelled."

Robin smiled and said that he had almost forgotten the whole affair.

"Regarding the money I owe," said the Knight, "here is the repayment," and he handed Robin three large bags of gold. "Regarding my gratitude," he went on, "nothing can repay for that; but here are some bows, some arrows and some suits. Take them and still consider me in your debt."

Such bows and arrows had never been seen before in Robin's stronghold and, as for the suits, they were particularly attractive, when compared with the threadbare clothes which Marian and her ladies were continually patching at the elbows and elsewhere.

Robin's men and those of Sir Richard fell to feasting; after which they spent the rest of the evening in revels. Next morning, the Knight prepared to depart but, before setting off, he thanked Robin not only for his hospitality, but for his earlier kindness. "Your assistance," he said, "came at a time when I was a broken man. It gave me a new life: it helped me to start all over again and I am eternally grateful."

Just as his horse began to move off, he beckoned to Robin, with a knowing wink.

"My castle lies on the edge of Nottingham town," he said, "and if any of your men are ever in trouble there, my guards have orders to invite them in."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TWO WILLS

WILL SCARLET and Will Gamewell were almost inseparable and it was for this reason that Robin Hood asked the two if they would care to carry out a dangerous piece of work that he wanted done. It need hardly be said that they both jumped at the idea, with alacrity.

"What is it you want us to do, Master?" they asked, in unison.

"It is like this," began Robin. "You know how the Sheriff captured me and Alan-a-Dale, and put us in prison. Well, we came very near to being hanged and, probably, would have been had not Little John appeared miraculously. To be caught like that has annoyed me and I just want somebody to annoy the Sheriff, so that we are quits."

The two Wills nodded, for they knew the whole story perfectly.

Robin continued, "A couple of hours ago, I made a very lucky meeting, which has given me a brilliant idea. As I was proceeding along the main road to Nottingham, I met two fellows. In my politest manner, I wished them 'good-day' and, then, one of them told me that he had no use for my bowings and scrapings: but what I could do was to tell him the quickest way to Nottingham, if I knew it. I suggested that civility was a good quality; to which he replied that, if I did not take care, I would get my head knocked off.

"Now, two such men put no fear in me and I roundly told them so. They laughed, and one said that I had better take care because they were messengers from the Bishop of Hereford, and they were carrying a letter to no less a person than the Sheriff of Nottingham.

"I thought that was interesting, so I invited the two fellows to come home with me. Naturally, they sneered

at me, which roused my anger. I covered them with my bow and threatened to shoot them dead, if they did not obey my commands. Luckily, Little John, whose habit of coming on the scene at the right moment is extraordinary, emerged from some trees, near by; and to cut the story short, we escorted one man apiece and now they are reposing in our stronghold chamber."

"What about the letter?" queried Will Scarlet.

"That," said Robin, "is here," and he drew it out of his breast pocket. "And, we now come to that part of the story which concerns you two. The letter from the Bishop asks the Sheriff to lend him £200. It is urgent, pressing, most important and all that; and he does hope the Sheriff will not fail him, as he wants it immediately. Now, this is the point. Do you think you could impersonate our two prisoners and get the £200 from the Sheriff? It would be such fun to disappoint the Bishop and, at the same time, to deprive the Sheriff of some of his ill-gotten gains."

The eyes of the two Wills glistened. "We'll have a good try," they both said.

"Do not forget," added Robin, "that Sir Richard Lea's castle will provide you with protection, if you need it."

Accordingly, the two men lost no time in setting out, accompanied by the precious letter. They reached Nottingham without incident and gained an audience with the Sheriff. The letter was produced and the high official read it. He looked glum. "I have not the money on hand," he said at length. "You must go back and tell your master that I have not the sum. Why, I could only muster £150."

"Then," said Will Scarlet, "had we not better take the £150. I know the Bishop will be dreadfully put out if we go back with nothing."

The Sheriff was silent for some moments. "Very well," he said at length. He turned to a chest and counted out the money which he placed in two bags. "Now, be very careful as you go home," he said. "There are those dreadful men led by Robin Hood, who would kill you if they knew what you were carrying. You have to pass through their neighbourhood, so be very, very careful."

The two Wills tried to appear suitably impressed; they thanked the Sheriff and were shown out. Just as they were proceeding to the main gate, they came face to face with the Bishop of Hereford!

The Bishop had felt so much in need of the money that, after his messengers had set out, he had considered it wiser to go and see the Sheriff personally. He might be able to persuade, where a mere letter would fail.

The two Wills looked at each other. "Here's a mess," said one to the other. "We had better hurry as soon as we get beyond the gate."

Once past the gate, Scarlet and Gamewell took to their heels, but it was too late. The arrival of the Bishop had aroused suspicion and a few hurried words between him and the Sheriff revealed the tact that the money had been entrusted to impostors. A hurried call for armed men was made and, in less than no time, a group of people, headed by the Sheriff, was racing after Scarlet and Gamewell. These two men saw that the only hope of gaining safety was to claim the sanctuary of Lea Castle, and this they did with the utmost speed.

Once inside the castle, the two Wills were in comparative safety. They were conducted to Sir Richard who gave orders that the portcullis was to be dropped, so that the pursuers might be foiled.

Scarlet and Gamewell could see the humour of the situation, and they treated the matter as a joke. Even Sir Richard laughed when he heard how easily the Sheriff had fallen into the trap. He was, undoubtedly, pleased that someone had been able to score off this crafty man, though, of course, he was prepared to admit that the affair was dishonest.

But, let us see what was happening outside the castle. The Sheriff, finding that there was no way in, decided to make an assault on the main gate. To do this effectively he drew off his forces, which had been by now considerably augmented by new-comers, and led them into the woods, where they could not be seen.

But, while doing this, he and his men could not see the main gate. Sir Richard guessed what was going to happen and suggested that a trick should be played on the forces.



The proud Bishop and the haughty Sheriff, smothered in a wet sticky mess of white paste, spluttering and fuming and raving

He gave orders that the drawbridge should be left in the "down" position: in other words, it should not be drawn up, as was the usual practice, when a castle was about to be stormed. In addition, he ordered that the planks of the bridge should be loosened, so that they were merely resting on their cross supports. All this was done hurriedly, while the Sheriff was deep in the woods and out of sight.

Suddenly, a rustling in the bushes told of coming activity, and, a few moments later, a large gang of men, led by the Sheriff, dashed out of cover and stormed on to the drawbridge. Here was a piece of luck, they thought. The drawbridge, being down, would help them to break open the portcullis and afford an easy way into the castle. Naturally, they concluded that something had gone wrong with the mechanism of the drawbridge.

But the mechanism was in perfect order. As soon as the entire force had gathered on the bridge, the chains were tightened and the bridge began to rise at one end. At first, the raising was of no consequence; but, very soon, the tilt became steeper and, then, the loose planks slid out of position. There was nothing to hold them and they went, one by one, with a mighty splash into the water of the moat. As each plank crashed down, the men standing on it were provided with a bath for which they were unprepared.

Here was a scene of confusion! Planks floating, men scrambling among the water lilies, and others clinging for dear life to the chains of the bridge.

The Sheriff was among the more fortunate of the crowd. He had clutched the portcullis and was now clinging to it in a way that suggested a monkey climbing up its cage at the Zoo. The indignant Bishop of Hereford was in much the same situation. He was clutching one of the drawbridge chains, and performing curious antics with his legs in an endeavour to gain a foothold.

But Scarlet and Gamewell had not been idle during the few minutes that the Sheriff was manœuvring in the woods. They had taken a bucket and, in it, mixed a thin paste of flour and water. They had gone to the room above the drawbridge and viewed all the confusion through holes which were always provided in the floor of this chamber.

When they saw the antics of the Sheriff and the Bishop, it was an easy matter for them to add to their discomfort. This they did by carefully pouring the paste on to these scrambling gentlemen.

Imagine the situation! The proud Bishop and the haughty Sheriff, smothered in a wet, sticky mass of white paste, spluttering and fuming and raving. A roar of laughter went up from those inside the castle when they saw, first the Bishop and then the Sheriff, drop into the water, and scramble across to the opposite bank.

Fortunately, every member of the attacking party was able to reach dry land with safety. The Sheriff and the Bishop forgot all about the money, for the time being, and only thought of their comfort and appearance. It was not a dignified spectacle to see these two gentlemen hastening home, covered with a white mess. Those townspeople of Nottingham, who had the good fortune to meet them on their way, never forgot the sight and, for many years after, it was a familiar remark to say that a thing was as white as the Sheriff.

Will Scarlet and Will Gamewell felt very pleased with their day's work. It was evening by the time they were ready to depart and, thanking Sir Richard for the help he had given, they slipped silently out of the castle and, guided by the moon, soon found themselves back at the encampment.

Two weary but happy men strolled into the clearing, where Robin was waiting. He had not gone to bed, as he had grown a little uneasy about their non-return. They threw the two bags on the grass and simply said, "The money." Robin's eyes glistened. "How did you manage to get it?" he asked eagerly. The story was soon told and Robin was delighted.

"I'm right glad," said Robin, when he had listened to the full details. "What is more," he added, "it has all come as it should have come."

The two Wills asked what he meant.

"It is like this," began Robin. "This afternoon, while you were away, I went to a spot within a mile of Nottingham, to see if I could be of any assistance to you. However, I neither heard nor saw anything of your tricks. Instead,

I met a worthy farmer who lives not far from Barnwell. He used to know my father and mother. This poor man, now bent and enfeebled with age, was in trouble. He told me, with tears in his eyes, that the Sheriff had accused him quite falsely of injuring one of the King's deer and, in consequence, had fined him a hundred pounds. It was as much as the poor fellow had saved in a lifetime, and now he is ruined. But all that is a little matter which we can put right. He shall have the contents of the two bags, and so his loss shall be turned into a profit. What say you, my fine fellows ? "

Scarlet and Gamewell were delighted and readily agreed to take every penny of the sum to the farmer on the morrow. In a way, it salved their consciences for, after all, they felt that what they had done was theft or robbery, even though it had been performed in the light of romance.

So the next day was an eventful one. Scarlet and Gamewell secretly set off to the farmer's abode, where they were able to turn a home shrouded in misery into one of happiness and delight. Robin set a splendid meal before his two captives and, after treating them right royally, placed them on the road to Hereford.

CHAPTER XVII

ROBIN HOOD AND WIDOW HARDLOCK

On one occasion, Robin was out hunting by himself in the forest. Little dreaming of any impending danger, he emerged from the trees, crossed over a road and was about to plunge into the forest on the opposite side when, to his horror, he saw the Bishop of Hereford coming along with a retinue of at least fifty men. The Bishop was not more than a hundred paces away and, unfortunately for our hero, he happened to recognise Robin in an instant.

The Bishop immediately flushed with excitement and cried to his followers to seize the man, pointing his finger at Robin, who had now taken to his heels.

In a moment, there was Robin darting off as fast as his legs would carry him, with a number of men in hot pursuit, and the Bishop panting and puffing in the rear.

Had Robin been given a fair start, he would certainly have eluded his followers in the tangle of the woods. But, unfortunately, he could not gain sufficient ground to make this possible.

The chase proceeded in and out of the trees, and along the paths when, suddenly, Robin thought of Widow Hardlock's cottage, which was near by He made towards it with all speed and darted inside

Widow Hardlock had several reasons for admiring Robin, for he had helped her many a time with food and fuel. She was sitting at her spinning wheel making yarn

"What's the matter?" she cried, as Robin came rushing into the room. "What's the matter?"

"I am being chased," he said "That dreadful Bishop is after me." Everyone for miles around knew who was meant by the dreadful Bishop and the Widow understood.

"Oh dear!" she almost screamed "What can we do?"

With that, she proceeded to snatch off her bonnet, shawl and dress, and she offered them to Robin. In almost no time, Robin had donned her attire and she had put on his. Then, Robin seated himself at the wheel and Widow Hardlock hid herself in a cupboard.

They had not completed their disguise a second too soon, for, almost on the instant, the Bishop's men rushed in.

"Where's the villain?" they cried, scowling at the old woman, attending to the yarn.

"Here he is," said one of them, opening the cupboard door. "Out you come, you rascal." And, with that, the widow, dressed as Robin, was dragged into the open and held tightly.

"Don't give him the slightest chance to escape," said the Bishop excitedly. "He is a slippery fellow, but we ought to have him safely this time."

With that, the men bound up their captive securely with ropes, glared at the person sitting at the spinning wheel and set out in triumphant procession for Nottingham, with none other than Widow Hardlock as the victim.

Robin, dressed in the old woman's clothes, watched the band of men depart gleefully. Then, as soon as they were at a safe distance, he crept out of the house and directed his steps towards the greenwood encampment. Whatever he was to do had to be done without the waste of a second, so he hurried.

It was a curious spectacle to see an old woman running and walking, alternately, in a breathless fashion, in and out of the woodland thicket.

Now, as luck would have it, this is exactly what Little John and Will Scarlet happened to see. By chance, they were walking in the direction of the widow's cottage and came upon the curious figure.

"Ho, ho!" said Little John, "here comes some poor wretch of a witch. I trust she will not bring us bad luck. Let s turn away, so that she does not see us."

But the witch or the woman, or whatever she was, did see them and came running up to them. "You are just in time, you fellows," gasped the witch, in a voice that was not unfamiliar. "Blow your bugle softly and summon our men," said the voice.

"Whose men?" queried Little *John* and *Will Scarlet* in unison.

"For goodness sake, don't be dull," said the person, petulantly. "There's no time to argue. Can't you see who I am?"

"Goodness gracious," ejaculated Will. "It's dear old Robin! My word, you do look a pretty sight."

"Yes, and so would you, if you had been in the scrape I have just escaped from," retorted Robin. Then, he told them the whole story, without the waste of a single word.

The bugle was blown and up came running a fine array of outlaws, all eager for any enterprise of daring. Robin changed into the suit worn by one of the subordinate men, who was told to get back to the camp, as quickly as possible, and make himself comfortable. Then, the force moved off at great speed in the direction of Nottingham; but it was careful to go by a round-about way.

The scheme worked admirably, for in less than two hours, Robin was able to place his men in a strong position that cut off the Bishop's forces from Nottingham. You should have seen the Bishop's look of dismay when he found that he had walked into a trap!

It took the worthy gentleman some little time to understand exactly what was happening. He saw Robin's band barring his way, and he saw Robin standing before his followers. Then, who was the Robin he had carefully bound with ropes and was leading a captive? Was this some piece of magic, or what, he wondered.

As the Bishop seemed to be slow in understanding, Robin helped him to grasp the facts. A few words of explanation put the whole matter in a nutshell. Hereford had been duped: his captive was an unoffending woman and not Robin, at all.

The Bishop of Hereford swore. "You shall pay for this piece of deception," he hissed at the woman.

"Oh! no, she will not," retorted Robin. "This good lady had no choice in the matter. I forced her to do whatever she did; so, if anyone is to blame, the blame is on me. And, now, my Lord Bishop, I command you to unloose the lady's bonds."

"Stephen," cried the Bishop, to one of his officers, "cut the ropes which bind the hag."

"Oh! no, no, no," said Robin. "You will unloose the bonds with your own hands."

The Bishop tried to suppress his rage. He marched up to the woman and, in an offensive manner, tugged at the cords and freed his captive.

"Very churlishly done, my Lord," exclaimed Robin. "And, now Madam," he said courteously to the old woman, "Will you be so good as to give the reverend gentleman a ringing box on the ears?" With that the widow did as she was told, and she did it in no half-hearted way.

"There is one little thing more," said Robin to the Bishop, "before we complete this matter. Time is money and you have wasted this good lady's time. She was working at her spinning wheel when you came and laid harsh hands on her. No doubt you would like to compensate her for your misdeeds."

The Bishop fumbled in his bag and tendered the old woman a silver coin.

"That's poor recompense," said Robin, coaxingly. "I set the reckoning something like this. To waste of precious time, £10. To rough treatment, £10. To the indignity of it all, £10. To sufferings through fear, £10. To damage to clothing, another £10. And, so that nothing shall be omitted from the reckoning, let us strike the bargain at £100. After all, my Lord, it may be a cheap way out of the business, because the only alternative is your head. Now, which is preferable from your point of view? One hundred golden pounds or your neck strung up on that tree?" and Robin pointed to an oak, with outstretched branches.

The Bishop hesitated a moment, looking as black as thunder. Then he said, firmly, "If I pay this hag . . ."

Robin interrupted, "This lady you mean."

"Well, then," continued the Bishop, "if I pay this woman £100, you promise to let me continue on my way to Nottingham, unmolested?"

"I certainly do," said Robin, "except that this lady has suffered a good deal: you have made her walk a great

distance; she is tired and I must borrow your steed to enable her to ride back to her cottage."

The Bishop was only thinking of getting out of the scrape with his life. He threw the sum of money at the widow's feet, motioned one of his men to give her his horse, and in less than five minutes, the whole cavalcade was making a disorganised rush for Nottingham town.

Robin now gathered his force together; he set the widow on the horse and she led a triumphal procession back to the greenwood encampment. That night a great feast was held, Widow Hardlock being the guest of the evening.

CHAPTER XVIII

ROBIN HOOD AT SEA

It was not often that Robin Hood strayed away from his band for long, but on one occasion he left his men for a lengthy period and went to sea. The story of this episode is told in one of the oldest ballads written in the English language, and it is interesting in that it differs considerably from all the other tales told of Robin.

It befell that, when the band of outlaws had grown to number over a hundred strong, Robin felt the need for some sort of a holiday. He called the band together and explained that he intended to go away, and when he was gone Little John and Will Scarlet were to be in charge, while Friar Tuck was to take care of Marian.

When all was planned, Robin rose early one morning, kissed his wife 'good-bye,' and set off, hardly knowing where his destination would be.

The ballad tells us that it was summer time and that the wild lily was in bud. With splendid weather, the tramp which Robin was undertaking was pleasant enough. He walked on and on, and eventually reached what was then the tiny village of Scarborough. In those days, there were no hotels and the only places in which wayfarers could lodge were inns. To one of these places went Robin and there he stayed for several days.

The inn was kept by a widow who, from all we can gather, was a kindly soul. She liked Robin's manly appearance and she noticed the polite and considerate way he spoke to the other visitors at the inn. Her interest in Robin was aroused, and she wondered why he was making the journey, what his occupation was, and so on. It must be remembered that, in those days, people were not accustomed to travel as they are now, and a man making a journey gave rise to all sorts of wonderment, if not to suspicion.

So, one morning, the widow made so bold as to ask Robin his name and other things about himself. Here is how the ballad-writer set out the conversation :

" What is thy name, thou fine fellow ?
I pray thee heartily tell to me."
" In mine own country where I was born,
Men called me Simon over the Lee."
" Simon, Simon," said the good wife,
" I wish thou may'st well brook thy name."
The outlaw was ware of her courtesie,
And rejoyc'd he had got such a dame.

Thus Robin, for the occasion, changed his name to Simon, and he proceeded to tell the good woman that he was a fisherman, but, at the moment, had no boat to sail.

The widow opened her eyes wide. " I own a fishing boat," she said, " and it sails to-morrow at dawn, but the master of the vessel is a man short. Would you care to make up the number ? " Robin Hood jumped at the opportunity and, when the master came into the inn a few hours later, the widow told him that she had engaged Simon to form one of the crew.

The rest of that day was spent in making preparations : so, when the dawn of the following day came, Robin was all ready to play his new rôle of fisherman.

It is fairly certain that Robin had never seen the sea before this visit to Scarborough, and it is quite certain that he had never been tossed and rolled about on it before. So, we may imagine that for the first day or two, at least, he was not too comfortable.

As a matter of fact, Robin had difficulty in hiding from the master and the rest of the crew that he was not used to the sea. One thing he could not hide and that was that, although he had claimed to be a fisherman, he knew nothing of fishing. When told to cast over the lines, he failed to bait them. Just imagine what the master would think of anyone who did that ! The master called him a lubber and said that he should have no part of the catch "for in truth he is of no part worthy." Robin bemoaned

his fate, saying "O woe is me," and that he wished he were back at Plympton Park, shooting the deer.

The master sneered at him and suggested that, if they were at Plympton Park, they would probably find he shot deer no better than he caught fish. While Robin, or Simon, was being roundly abused, he spied a vessel bearing down on them. The master looked eagerly at the vessel. It was his turn to cry "O woe is me," for it was a French ship, manned by pirates.

"They will not spare one man of us," wailed the master, "but will steal our ship and carry us back to France, where they will make us slaves."

This was Robin's opportunity.

"Give me my bow and leave the rest to me," he said, gleefully. More bragging and boasting, thought the master. for the ballad makes him say:

"Hold thy peace, thou long lubber,
For thou art nought but braggs and boast:
If I should cast thee overboard,
There were nothing but a lubber lost."

Robin flew into a rage at this description of his character. "I will show you," he growled and, with that he bent his bow, took steady aim, and pierced the heart of the foremost Frenchman, who fell backwards into the hold of the boat. Six further arrows decided the fate of six more Frenchmen and, by this time, the two vessels were touching broadside.

With a shout of triumph, Robin leapt aboard the pirate and, to his surprise found that he had accounted for the entire crew. Thus, the ship and all it contained had fallen a prize to the fishing smack. There were twelve thousand bright golden pounds in the hold, which were quickly transferred to the English boat. What a lucky catch for a fisherman!

When the boat reached Scarborough once more, the money was shared. Robin, who could have claimed the entire sum, took half, and the rest was divided between the master, the crew and the widow. What such money meant to these people can be imagined. The widow said that,

as soon as she set eyes on Simon, she knew he was a man to do great things, and here was the proof.

In due time, Robin returned home, laden with the gold, vowing that

> "*With this gold, for the opprest*
> *An habitation, I will build,*
> *Where they shall live in peace and rest.*"

CHAPTER XIX

ROBIN HOOD QUARRELS WITH LITTLE JOHN

It is not often that Robin quarrelled with his friends: but on one occasion he fell out with Little John and, being such a rare incident, it is well worth recounting.

Here are the facts: One day, Robin told Little John that he intended to set out for Nottingham, there and then, because he wished to attend mass at the Church of St. Mary.

In reply, Little John said, "If you accept my advice, you will not go alone: but you will take a dozen picked men with you."

Robin retorted to this that he did not often have the opportunity of going to church but, when he did, it was not his practice to take an armed guard with him.

"As you please," said Little John. "But you know the danger and it is best to be on the safe side."

"Do you think I am afraid of anyone?" snapped Robin. "Don't you know me better than that?"

Little John replied that there was no case of fear, but merely prudence. "And, as a matter of fact," he continued, "I would, also, like to attend mass and so would Will Scarlet. Let the three of us go together."

Robin retorted that he would go alone, that he would have no bodyguard when on such a mission and, as he was the leader of the band, he commanded Little John to stay at home in charge of the camp.

It is an unwise thing for two people to lose their tempers at the same time; for trouble is bound to ensue. As Robin was clearly in a ruffled frame of mind, it would have been better for Little John to have left him to it, when the fit would have quickly passed away.

But Little John did no such thing. He retorted that he would do as he liked. This exasperated Robin who made

a move to strike John. John grasped his sword and for the first time, an incident of this unhappy nature occurred in the camp. "Is is lucky for you," said Little John deliberately, "that I have sworn to serve and obey you."

Robin shrugged his shoulders, turned on his heels, and strode out of the greenwood camp. The long walk to Nottingham cooled his anger and, before he had passed through the southern gate, he felt ashamed and wished the incident had never happened.

Meanwhile, Little John was very upset about the matter and he sought out Will Scarlet, telling him all that had occurred. "I'm just going to pack my things," he said, "and leave this place for ever."

Scarlet was vexed at what he had heard. "John," he said, "do nothing rash. You can't go and do a mad thing like that. The old camp needs you and it would never be the same place, if you left it. Besides, think of the men; it might easily be the break-up of our little society of outlaws."

Just at this moment, Marian came upon the scene.

"What's the trouble?" she asked in her pleasant way.

Scarlet related the incidents, as they had been told him. "And," he added, "this great big silly has taken the whole thing to heart and threatens to leave us."

Marian took Little John by both hands.

"Whether you are right or Robin is right," she said pleadingly, "do please forget all about it. Do it for my sake, Little John, if for nothing else. Robin may not be well: he may be worried. There are a thousand reasons why he ought to be forgiven or you ought to be forgiven, for that matter. You can never tell why a person acts in a hasty manner or in a bad-tempered way and, at least, you ought to wait and see how he behaves when he gets home. Now, darling John, don't be a silly; be the large, warm hearted fellow you usually are."

Marian looked into his eyes pleadingly and Little John felt about as uncomfortable as a man can feel when he has lowered himself in the eyes of a woman he admires.

"You are right, Marian," he said huskily. "Now I come to think of it, I do believe that Robin had something on his mind, about which he said nothing. In fact, I'm

sure, now, that he had. And what's more, we ought to follow him and be near at hand to help him, if aught goes amiss with him."

Little John's words worried Marian.

"Please do go at once, if you think anything wrong is likely to happen," she said.

It took very little time for Little John and Will Scarlet to disguise themselves as two friars and to set out for Nottingham, in search of Robin.

Now, let us see how Robin was faring. As soon as he entered the Church, he happened to be recognised by a friar who attended on the Sheriff. The price of Robin's head was still a prize that could be won: so the fellow slipped out of the building and went to the Sheriff, telling him where Robin could be found. This was, indeed, good news, thought the haughty official, and the opportunity must not be wasted. First, all the town gates were closed: then, all the streets were guarded by soldiers and, finally, a strong body of men was rushed to the Church. Thus, no chance of escape was to be provided.

It is not usual for armed men to attack a person in a place of worship, but the Sheriff waved aside all such decent customs and ordered his soldiers to rush in and apprehend Robin, by force. Thus, Robin Hood was surrounded even before he knew he had been recognised.

The next few moments were, indeed, exciting. Robin felled the first man who approached, with a blow. The second man rolled over just as easily and a third would have suffered the same fate had he not drawn back out of arm's reach.

This gave a pause to the proceedings, which afforded Robin the opportunity of putting his back to the wall and drawing his sword. As long as his adversaries came within reach one at a time, it looked as though Robin might have dispatched them all. But, unfortunately, as one fellow dropped to the floor, Robin stumbled against him and fell over as well.

This gave the Sheriff's men the opportunity they wanted. Before Robin could scramble to his feet, they pounced on him and bound him securely. The Sheriff approached and put his face close to that of Robin.

" Now, my fine fellow," he hissed, " you are finished."

With that, he commanded that the prisoner should be housed in the strongest cell that the Castle possessed and carefully guarded.

In order to show his delight at the capture, the Sheriff ordered flags to be flown throughout the town and all work was to cease, the remainder of the day being proclaimed a public holiday. But, the gates were to be kept closed against all unknown travellers.

Just about this time, Little John and Will Scarlet arrived in their friars' attire. To their surprise, the gates were closed and nobody would let them in. What could be the matter ? Why were the people enjoying a public holiday ? Something of importance had happened, but what could it be ? The two men grew apprehensive, but they did not know why.

Then, there came a friar towards the gate from the inside and the keeper allowed him to pass through. The keeper bowed low and showered congratulations on the holy man. " It's the best day's work you have ever done," he called after the friar, who waved to him gleefully as he proceeded out of the town.

" I have a feeling of impending evil," whispered John to Will. " I wonder what this fellow has done that his work to-day has merited these congratulations."

Then, the friar from Nottingham saw the two friars who had been refused admittance to the town.

" Good morning, brothers," he said affably. " It's been a glorious time," he added.

The two remarked that they were in ignorance of the happenings.

" Ah ! " said the first. " It's the end of that reprobate, Robin. He's finished at last." And, then, he told the whole story of the capture, nor did he forget to emphasise the part he had played.

John and Will looked at each other, but said nothing to reveal their feelings.

" Which way are you going ? " they asked of the real friar, and when he told them, they suggested they should all go along together.

When about a mile had been covered and a quiet spct

was reached, Little John turned to the real friar and asked if he were truly responsible for Robin's capture.

"Of course I was," retorted the holy man. "Had it not been for me, he might be praying yet in the Church, for all I know or care."

"I am asking," said Little John, "because Robin is the captain of our band. You see, I am not a friar; this cloak is merely a disguise. I am one of Robin's admirers."

"Look out," cried Will, and, had it not been for John's quick eye, his head would have rolled on the ground. For this is what happened: The moment the friar perceived that he had fallen into the hands of the enemy, he whipped out a sword and swung it in a mighty sweep at John's head. The latter ducked and the sharp blade merely passed over him.

"Ho! ho!" said Little John in measured tones, "That is your little game, is it? Well, it gives me an opportunity of returning the compliment. I won't take you unawares. Get ready."

With that, the two crossed swords and, in less than a minute, the friar lay dead. In less than five more minutes, his outer garments had been taken from him and he was then buried in a hastily-made grave.

"What shall we do now?" queried Will Scarlet. "How would it be to take these clothes and impersonate the friar? We might be able to obtain an audience with the Sheriff and do something useful."

"That's not a bad idea," retorted Little John.

"I had better be the one to masquerade as him," said Scarlet, "since you are too long. You could not be taken for him at all."

"Very well, then," said Little John, "but you are not going alone. I had better come as your friend."

The two very soon made their plans and Will Scarlet imitated the mincing gait of the dead friar admirably. In fact, Little John asked Will if he were really Will and not the dead man.

"Ah," said Will, with a chuckle, "perhaps this is going to be the best day's work I have ever done, the same as that gate-keeper fellow said to our departed companion, just now."

In a short while, the gate was reached and a sign from Will was sufficient for it to be thrown wide open.

"Come along, Holy Friars," said the keeper. "I suppose you can vouch for your friend, Friar Ambrose?" he added.

"Oh! yes, quite," answered Will, in a careless way.

"So, my name is Friar Ambrose," whispered Will to John, when he had gone a few paces forward. "That's something I wanted to know."

The two strolled up to the Castle and demanded an audience with the Sheriff. "Tell him Friar Ambrose wishes to see him," Will said to the page-boy.

In a few moments, the two were ushered into the presence of the Sheriff, who enjoyed talking about the morning's good work.

"It was splendid of you, Ambrose," he said, slapping the Friar on the back. "Splendid. If only the King could be told of this piece of news he would be delighted," and here he dropped his voice to a whisper. "It would be a title for me and preferment for you."

This gave Will an idea.

"Well, as it happens, I have to set out for London to-morrow. The Archbishop has sent for me and, more than likely I shall have an audience with His Majesty," he said.

"Good, splendid, grand," exclaimed the Sheriff, rubbing his hands. "And mind you do not forget to give him a good account of it all. Make it a really fine story, with plenty of dash and go about it. Put plenty of frills into the yarn--do not tell him just the bare facts as they happened," he added, with a knowing wink.

"You trust me," said Will. Then, he looked round the room and, thrusting his forefinger into the Sheriff's ribs, he added, "What about celebrating the event?"

"Ah! yes, of course," said the Sheriff who had a weakness for strong drink. He rang a bell and, in a few minutes, the table was arrayed with flasks of wine and three goblets.

First Will and Little John pretended to drink the Sheriff's health: then the Sheriff drank theirs, but he did it separately. They drank the healths of others, everybody's in fact, even Robin's, by way of sarcasm.

In a very little time, the Sheriff's brain was dazed and that was the opportunity his two visitors wanted. Will

hastily scrawled a note and it did not take a great deal of scheming to make the Sheriff affix his seal. And, then they forced him to partake of still more liquor, so that in the end, he fell into a deep sleep.

Armed with the note, the two friars set off to find Robin in his cell. This was no difficult matter, since they told everybody they met that they were going to pray for his soul for the last time.

Arrived at the cell, which was very deep down underground, they found the gaoler patrolling the outside of the door. "Hallo, gaoler," they cried out in a loud voice, so that the inmate might hear, "We come with a document from the Sheriff to enable us to visit this man, Robin Hood."

The gaoler looked at the document carefully. It commanded him to permit two friars, one of which was Friar Ambrose, to enter Robin Hood's cell, so that they might pray for his soul for the last time. And there was the Sheriff's seal.

"Everything's in order," said the man, when he had read the document and, with that, he turned the key and swung open the door.

For two seconds, many exciting things happened in that cell, but nobody heard the shouts of the goaler, because it was all transpiring too far down in the depths of the earth.

The details need not be recounted: they may easily be guessed. Suffice it to say that the keeper was locked in and that Robin Hood walked out in the spare raiment which Will Scarlet had not required after donning the clothes of Friar Ambrose.

Three monks walked through the passages of the Castle and out into the streets. They did not hurry: they just sauntered along until they reached the town gate.

"What, off again?" said the keeper, as he let them through. "You are busy to-day, aren't you?" he added in his cheery way.

"Yes," replied Will flippantly. "It's the best day's work I have ever done," which, possibly, was true.

CHAPTER XX

THE BISHOP IS ROBIN'S GUEST

As you already know, the Bishop of Hereford was no friend of Robin and there was no love lost between the two. Accordingly, it pleased Robin immensely to hear, one day, that the Bishop was spending a holiday in Nottingham and that he had decided to ride in Sherwood Forest on the morrow.

Robin rubbed his hands gleefully. "We must provide him with some excitement," he exclaimed. "How would it be to invite him forcibly to a dinner under the greenwood tree and, then, let him go away a free man? At the very least, it would give him the shock of his life."

The others agreed and the plans were soon laid. Fifty men were to post themselves, hidden in special parts of the forest, and once the Bishop came within their boundary, they were not to let him escape. In addition, Robin and four others were to dress up as shepherds, and were to sit by the roadside cooking a deer. They were to do this where the Bishop would be sure to find them and, then, the amusing part would be to hear what he said.

Next morning came, the men hid themselves at their posts, and Robin, with his four assistants, donned the most wretchedly tattered garments they could find, and took up a position by the side of the main road. Previously, they had killed a deer and, just as two of them were skinning it and two more were lighting a wood fire, my Lord Bishop of Hereford came riding along, almost as though Robin had planned that as well.

The expression which came over the Bishop's round face, when he saw what was going on, can be imagined.

"You Saxon dogs," he cried, "what, in the name of goodness, are you doing? Think you that the Sheriff will allow you to steal the King's deer? You shall be hanged for it."

Robin looked up. He was wearing the expression of a half-witted man and, in the most simple manner possible, said "Eh!"

The Bishop was in no mood to suffer fools gladly and he repeated all his words over again: but in a louder voice. Robin put his hand to his ear, as though deaf, and simply said, "Beg pardon, eh!"

This time the Bishop roared out his words like so much thunder and, when he had finished, Robin meekly said "Yes."

The Bishop became exasperated. "Who are you and what are you?" he shouted.

With hesitation Robin replied, "We—are—men—and—we—are shepherds."

"Then, if you are shepherds," cried the Bishop, "eat your own beasts and leave the King's alone." To which Robin meekly replied "Eh!"

This was too much for the holy man; he turned to his mounted guard. "William," he said, "arrest these idiots and take them to the Sheriff. They shall hang for this."

William moved towards Robin.

"Hold hard," cried Robin, in an entirely different voice, and drawing his bugle from a capacious pocket, he blew the call notes of the day. Immediately, fifty men sprang from nowhere and came running up. The Bishop was never noted for bravery and the sight of these men made his heart leap. He saw in a trice that the half-wit was Robin in disguise and the men formed part of his gang. So, he wheeled round his horse and intended to gallop back to Nottingham. But, as he turned, a man stepped out and gripped the bridle of his horse. Escape was impossible.

The Bishop's usual red face grew redder. He turned to Robin and in the words of a ballad-writer:

> *"Oh! pardon, pardon," said the Bishop,*
> *"Oh! pardon, I you pray.*
> *For if I had known it had been you,*
> *I'd have gone some other way."*

Robin strode up to him and looked him squarely in the face.

"My Lord Bishop, what do I owe you?" he said "Surely you cannot hope for favours, never having rendered me any?"

Cowards, we are told, die many times before their death. If the remark is true, the Bishop certainly died at this minute, perhaps more than once. He twitched nervously and could not utter the words framed by his mind.

"Perhaps, I could help you, if there is anything you need," he said at last.

"And, perhaps you will change your mind immediately you are free," said Robin.

Then Robin's attitude changed. He threw off his dirty clothes and revealed the neat suit of green that he usually wore.

"My sentence on you, Lord Bishop of Hereford, is that you dine with me as soon as the meal is ready," said Robin.

The Bishop looked as though he had not caught the words or had misinterpreted them.

Soon the dinner was ready, but it was none too soon for the holy man who liked his food; moreover the morning ride had given him an appetite. The company sat upon the grass and did full justice to the various dishes. Even the venison was eaten with relish by His Grace, who was glad to be offered a second helping. The wine, too, was excellent and the Bishop found himself raising his glass to the toast of "absent friends." Little by little, he threw aside his dignity and even his fears, and then he knew how to crack a joke with the best of them.

At last, the dinner was over and the Bishop began to wonder if Robin would let him go or whether he had some form of torture to put him through. Robin noticed his uneasiness.

"My Lord," he said, "you are longing to leave us and, indeed, we have engagements that we must presently fulfil, so let us make a move."

The Bishop stood. "What is the reckoning?" he asked.

In his most polished manner, Robin said that he never charged his guests anything; but, if the Bishop cared to leave a donation for the poor, it would be faithfully applied to a deserving cause.

"My only regrets are," replied the Bishop, "that I have come out with hardly any money."

Robin glanced at the Bishop's horse, which a servant had just brought up to him. Buckled to the saddle was a bag—a weighty bag—such as served for carrying money. The Bishop noticed the glance.

"Oh! that," he said apologetically, "that is not mine: it is some rent money that the Sheriff asked me to collect It is the Sheriff's money."

"Is that so," said Robin, smilingly. "Then, Little John, will you be so good as to count it. The Sheriff owes me much and this may be a way of wiping out some of the debt."

Little John did as he was bid; then announced, "Five hundred crowns, Master."

Robin sniffed. "That's a good deal for rents taken from cottagers," he said. "My friend," he continued, "will you be so kind as to give my compliments to the worthy Sheriff and tell him that I have reduced his debt by the sum of half a thousand crowns?"

The Bishop was lifted into his saddle: he waved a feeble "good-bye" and a little cloud of dust told that he had gone off in the direction of Nottingham.

CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER MEETING WITH THE BISHOP

Of course, the Bishop of Hereford was not content to leave matters where they stood. The loss of the money rankled, and he vowed that Robin should suffer for his deeds.

Accordingly, he talked over a number of possible plans with the Sheriff; but, frankly, the Sheriff was beginning to think that the best thing would be to leave Robin alone. He seldom gave trouble except when it was a case of retaliation, the Sheriff argued, and, if he had no cause to retaliate, he would not make himself a nuisance.

All the Sheriff would do, then, was to lend a strong band of soldiers, but he feared to take any part in a punitive raid himself. This satisfied the Bishop well enough and the arrangements were made.

Now the Bishop was no soldier and he knew practically nothing about tactics or of how to command a fighting force. Still, he was not aware that he possessed any deficiency in this direction, and he cheerfully put himself at the head of the Sheriff's troup. The men, whom he led, had absolutely no confidence in him and, when a force enters upon an engagement in this spirit, it is beaten before it begins.

Under these circumstances, the Bishop at the head of his band, set out one morning, soon after he had been deprived of the gold by Robin. He was in a contented frame of mind, for had not Robin's last hour almost arrived? He mused to himself as he rode along, how he would throw his whole weight on the outlaws and crush them unmercifully. Not a man should escape: no, the entire horde should die the death this time. And, then, when he got back to Nottingham, everybody would point to him and say, "There goes the good Bishop who crushed Robin when nobody else could."

It is very easy to build castles in the air, in this way; but it is not nearly so easy to build them really, and the Bishop found this out before the sun set on this particular day.

In the first place, the Bishop had determined to surprise Robin, and to this end had kept the preparations a secret. But, he had only just emerged from Nottingham gate when he and his force were espied by a poor tramp. The tramp happened to be Will Scarlet, in disguise.

"Ho! ho!" said Will to himself. "The Bishop—soldiers—armed to the teeth—heading towards our camp. I see. Robin is likely to have some visitors. It will be just as well for him to know about it."

With that, Will turned about and long before the Bishop reached the neighbourhood of the greenwood glade, Robin's forces were waiting for events, also armed to the teeth.

It was something of a surprise for Hereford to find that the outlaws were expecting him. "How on earth does that fellow get to know about everything that goes on?" he said under his breath. However, it did not really matter, for they were more than two to one, and numbers would count

Now, it must be explained that the country-side had just experienced a fortnight's rain and as nobody, in those days, knew anything about draining the land, there were several swamps and marshy areas in the district. There was one place that was particularly treacherous. The water had so softened the earth that, though it appeared no more than wet and muddy, it would hardly bear the weight of a man. It was shaped like a horseshoe, with a comparatively safe area nearly but not quite surrounded by the dangerous belt. Of course, Robin Hood knew all about the conditions of the land and took great care to keep out of the trouble.

My Lord Bishop of Hereford was in a hurry: he wanted success and he wanted it quickly. So, almost as soon as he saw the outlaws lined up to receive him, he commanded the shooting to begin. Robin decided on a ruse. He ordered his men to fall back slowly. Could the Bishop really believe his eyes? The enemy were already retreating

He was elated. They fell back even more, and still more. It was splendid, wonderful!

Then Robin's men stopped shooting. Have they run short of arrows or are their bows too wet to use, wondered the Bishop, but, in either case, it hardly mattered. It was success that did matter, and success was almost within grasp. So thought the Bishop.

But Robin had a good reason for retreating; it was so as to get his men within the dry centre of the horseshoe, with the Bishop's force outside the dangerous area. This, he accomplished fairly easily and, when the two positions were satisfactory from his point of view, he pretended that he had run short of arrows.

It was a capital scheme, for no sooner had the Bishop come to the conclusion that Robin was unable to defend himself than this worthy prelate led a charge. Forward raced the Nottingham men, with the Bishop in front of them. Plomp, plomp, plomp; and in less than ten seconds, there were half a hundred men floundering about in mud, knee deep.

The Bishop, being a man weighing many stones above the average, fared worst of the lot. His courage and enthusiasm had led him further into the mire than the others and his excessive weight had dragged him down so speedily that, in no time, he was immersed up to the shoulders. The look of horror which came over the unfortunate man's face was beyond description. He was too frightened to cry for help.

Robin felt sorry for him, even though he was a ruthless enemy. He beckoned to Will Scarlet.

"Give me a hand," he said hurriedly.

With that, the two men picked up some small logs, that were lying near by, and by forming stepping-stones with these, it was possible for them to approach the sinking man. They grabbed his collar none too soon and, with the utmost difficulty and considerable danger to themselves, they dragged him to safety. The Bishop's men floundered out of the mud more easily, and not one stayed behind to see what became of their leader.

Robin and his followers took the Bishop home and washed him clean: then they lent him a dry suit and gave

him a good meal. At the conclusion of it all, Robin provided him with a horse and bade him a safe journey back to Nottingham.

Why Robin did not hang him on the highest tree was something the Bishop could never understand.

CHAPTER XXII

THE KING VISITS ROBIN HOOD

SOON after King Henry the Third ascended the throne, he had cause to visit Nottingham, where he became the guest of the Sheriff. It was only natural that the Sheriff should loose no time in telling the King all he could about the villain, Robin Hood. He explained how he stole His Majesty's deer, how he robbed and killed innocent subjects and how he plotted in every way against law and order.

The King listened politely to all that the Sheriff said and, then, smiled.

" I know something already of this man," he replied, " and, from all that I have been able to make out, he carries a noble heart under that green coat of his. I know he is ever ready to help in a good cause." The Sheriff bit his lips and, to a man of lesser rank, would have become abusive.

For some time, the King was silent. " I know what I will do," he said eventually. " I will go, myself, and meet this Robin Hood, to find out all about him."

" If you take that risk," the Sheriff hastened to add, " you must go with a picked body of men who know how to stand up to his wiles."

The King assented and a hundred trusty men were selected for the escort. It took some days to make the complete selection and, in the mysterious ways of the forest, Robin became aware of what was happening.

As a result, Robin sent a message to the King, stating that he would be overjoyed to meet His Majesty, if the latter came alone: but, if he set out with the intended retinue, Robin and all his men would retire before him and, thus, they would never meet. Robin added that whatever happened, he would not harm the King nor allow anyone else to do so.

"Ah!" said the Sheriff, "that's what he says now, but wait until you have fallen into his trap and, then, it will be a question of a fabulous ransom."

The King smiled on the Sheriff.

"I am afraid you wrong him," he said, "for there is the ring of truth in his words and I am prepared to trust the fellow."

Without anyone knowing, the King put on the habit of a monk and started off by himself, next morning, to find Robin Hood. He had gone some way when he met a tall fellow, whom we know as Little John, but of whom the King had never heard.

"Whither away?" said Little John, affably, to which the King replied that he was making for Mansfield and that he wanted to get there in a hurry, seeing that he was afraid of the foresters.

Little John eyed the stranger and instinctively felt that he was someone in disguise; consequently it was necessary to find out all about him. To serve this end, John told the monk that, seeing it was near dinner time, the courtesy of the forest demanded that he should invite him, the monk, to a meal, provided by Robin Hood.

The monk, or shall we say the King, hesitated a moment and then agreed to follow Little John. In less than five minutes, the camp was reached. It so happened that a visitor had arrived a second or more before and Robin Hood was engaged in welcoming him. Little John signed to the monk to wait a while, until Robin was free to speak to him.

It must be explained that the first visitor was our old friend Sir Richard Lea. He had come expressly to be present should the King pay his promised visit. The King recognised his trusty servant, Sir Richard, at once, but Sir Richard could not be expected to distinguish the features of the monk.

The conversation continued at some length between Robin and Sir Richard and those who were standing around heard the latter tell Robin that the King was a true gentleman, who would never break his word nor do a mean thing. At these words, Robin showed evident pleasure.



Robin . . . dropped on his knees and repeated the words,
"God Save the King"

Then Robin turned to the monk and, bowing, apologised for keeping him waiting.

"What is thy name, man?" he asked.

The man simply replied by saying he was a monk.

"Please push back that hood," said Robin, "that I may see thy features."

The answer was a gruff "no." Robin looked questioningly at the man before him.

"Must I push it back for you?" he asked amiably.

"You dare not," came the reply.

"Dare not? ho! ho!" said Robin and, by a deft stroke, off went the hood.

As quick as lightning, the monk raised a hand and over went Robin like a nine-pin. Sir Richard was standing near-by. He could not bear to see Robin treated so disrespectfully. He thrust out at the monk and the monk went down. But the monk was no sooner on the ground than he grabbed Sir Richard by the foot and brought him down too.

In less than a second, there were three men on the ground and, in less than another second, there were three men up again on their feet. Robin thought it a good joke and was roaring with laughter. Sir Richard did not know quite what to think: but suddenly he turned very white, fell on his knees and exclaimed, "God Save the King."

Robin's laugh melted away and, silently, he stole up to Sir Richard's side, dropped on his knees and repeated the words, "God Save the King." His Majesty stood there frowning.

"What have you to say for yourself?" he asked of Robin.

"Simply that I knocked the hood from the head of a monk; but that King Henry has no more loyal subjects than he can see now," said Robin.

"Very good," replied the King who, being unable to keep a straight face any longer, burst out laughing. "It was my fault," he said eventually, "for coming in a disguise."

After that, the whole party sat down to one of the finest repasts that have ever been set before a king. And when the meal was over, Robin's men gave a display of

archery and quarter-staff such as Henry had never seen before. The King praised the men highly and he congratulated Robin, saying that a band such as his was useful in reducing the power of the wicked barons.

When the King prepared to leave, Robin asked if his men might have the honour of escorting him part of the way back to Nottingham.

"Only if they will come all the way," said Henry, with a twinkle in his eye. Robin was delighted. Imagine the surprise of the Nottingham folk and, above all, the surprise of the Sheriff, when they saw a hundred foresters march into the town, headed by none other than the King!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END OF THE STORY

AFTER the triumphant march into Nottingham, the Sheriff felt that Robin would be more useful as a friend than an enemy. As a result, he courted him in various ways and endeavoured to shower favours on him. At the suggestion of Sir Richard Lea, Robin's band became recognised as a part of the Army and was known as the Royal Regiment of Archers. As such, it did much good work in various parts of the country, and there is reason to believe that a detachment once went on the Continent to fight under Henry's banner.

But the changed existence, though it was no longer of an unlawful character, was less to Robin's liking than the freedom of Sherwood Forest. Life, now, consisted for the most part in living in London and attending ceremonial functions. Being so smart a body of men, the Royal Archers were always called upon when guards of honour were needed, and there was never a Royal procession which did not include a company of Robin's band. It was a life that would have gladdened the hearts of many men: but it was not the natural existence that Robin had enjoyed in his younger days.

It was only when a tournament was held that our hero experienced a real thrill. For then, he could be proud of his followers, since they never failed to win the lion's share of the awards.

Both Robin and his wife, Marian, were great favourites in Court circles. It was natural that the one at the head of such a crack regiment should be drawn into the limelight of society, whilst Marian's beauty and genial nature brought her many friends. They were overwhelmed with invitations to banquets and balls and, it must be admitted, that they became surfeited with them. Marian would

often sigh for the open-air life of the bygone days, when she hunted the deer and slept under the canopy of heaven.

"Let us run away from all this make-believe," she would sometimes say to her husband. Then, they would pack their belongings and, with a few of their old friends, such as Alan-a-Dale, Ellen and Little John, make their way to those foreign countries now known as Holland and Belgium. There they would hunt the wild boar and other beasts, and, in a measure, recapture the old spirit of Sherwood.

Of course, it will be recognised that Robin and Marian now were growing old, and a time came when Marian had a premonition that she was nearing the end. As a result, an overwhelming passion filled her with a desire to return to the old greenwood encampment, where Will Scarlet and other friends were still living. The King's sanction was sought and he permitted Robin to give up his leadership of the Archers.

The two left London for ever and journeyed to Lea Castle, whither old Sir Richard had invited them to stay awhile, before going on, finally, to the greenwood.

Sir Richard welcomed them on their arrival right royally: but he was amazed to notice the change that had come over Marian. She was no longer the brilliant woman he had known of yore, but a pathetic invalid, who needed the utmost care and nursing. All his resources were placed at her disposal, but they were unavailing, and it was not long before she died peacefully.

Robin was left a broken man. Nothing would satisfy him, now, but to return to the greenwood encampment. Will Scarlet and a few of the old friends escorted him through the woods and brought him back to the home of his earlier exploits. There they made a fuss of the old man and tried to make him feel that the past interests would be revived. They gave him a bow and helped him to shoot. but his hand was no longer steady and his eye had lost its unerring accuracy. He could not shoot. They sat him in his favourite chair and built up the fire: they recounted the stirring incidents of the past, but he only paid heed to them in a listless fashion.

One night, Will spoke of the day when Robin and Will

Gamewell won the belt at Mansfield and then lost it. " And do you remember," he said, " you told us how the shy youth, whom nobody knew, got it back for you ? "

Robin's eyes lit up.

" Ah ! " he said " Wasn't Marian splendid ! She was great ! There never was a girl like, like . . ."

Will rushed to his side. Robin had fallen forward in his chair. He never finished the sentence. Robin was no longer separated from Marian.

THE END